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ISSUE 658

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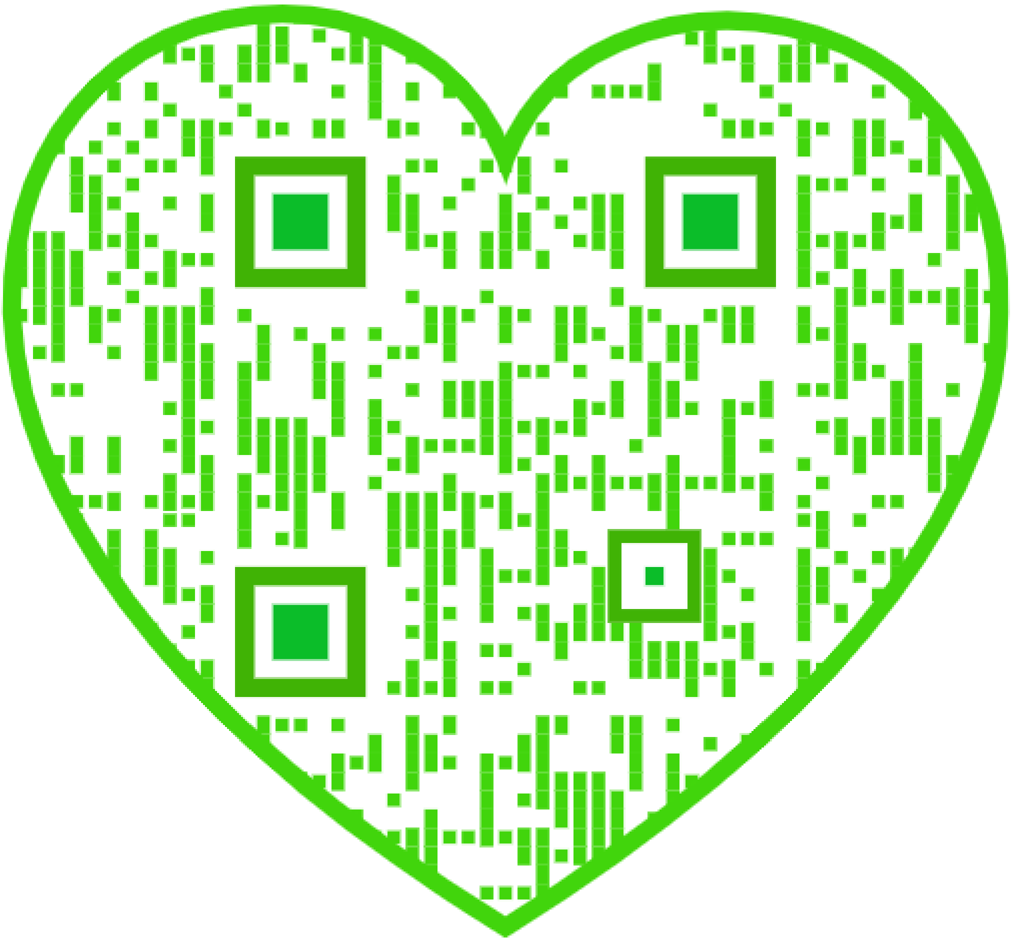

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FIRST WORDS JOHN FORD

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CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2023

It has been a busy month here at *Caravan World* headquarters with reviews in Coffs Harbour, NSW, and Ballarat, Vic, a caravan show in Melbourne and our annual Caravan of the Year event at Warrnambool, Vic. In between, we have been working on our caravan to prepare for a trip north later in the year.

The Caravan of the Year (COTY) presented by MSA 4X4 Accessories event was fantastic, and you'll be amazed by some of the caravans that showed up this year. We have always believed that the event drives the industry to new heights, and every entrant has elevated its build quality and innovation this time around. Choosing a winner will be tougher than ever, so keep an eye out for the outcomes in the next two issues.

Big vans were popular at COTY, and the judges had the chance to drive a range of the latest tow rigs. They included a Toyota HiLux, a LandCruiser 200 Series, a Ford F-150 Heavy Duty, RAM 1500 and 2500 HD, a Chevy Silverado 2500 HD and a couple of Ford Rangers. Additionally, the review in Coffs Harbour had me in a RAM 1500 TRX, and in Ballarat, I drove a late-model Range Rover, so there's been plenty of variety. Maybe we should select a tow vehicle winner from the COTY 2025 event.

While working on the van, I noticed the original equipment Pedders shock absorber rubbers were in poor condition, so I took one to a suspension shop for advice. They identified the shock absorber as compatible with various early model LandCruisers, including a 1970s FJ40. The issue was that the top bolts required a collar to fit the rubbers correctly, and over time they had worn away, causing the rubber bush to degrade. We organised a set of new collars, and I bought a set of neoprene bushes from Pedders, which are said to be more durable than the rubber ones that come with the shocks, raising the question of why they don't fit them with new shocks and why the suspension and van builders use different bolt sizes for the top and bottom mounts of the shock absorbers. Any thoughts?

On the way home from COTY, I passed through Melbourne and picked up a new Bushman 190L fridge that fitted snugly in the back of my wife Heather's station wagon. In the next issue, we'll have a report on how we will fit it into the Trakmaster, as I need to modify the cabinet where the old 150L gas fridge has been for the past 13 years and sort out a 12V power supply.

Have fun,
John

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***Photographed by** Ted Airey*

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Tekton Expedition SVX-4

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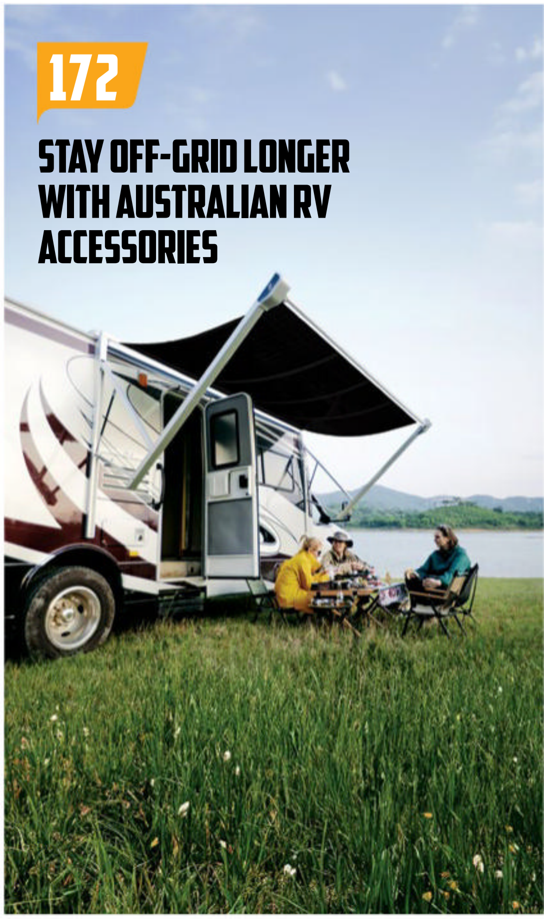

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STAY OFF-GRID LONGER WITH AUSTRALIAN RV ACCESSORIES

EPIC READERS' RIGS

COMPETITION KICKS OFF IN MAY!

Get ready, Caravan World *readers — our Readers' Rigs competition is going to be bigger than ever! Starting in May, not only will you have the chance to win a fantastic new monthly prize (Hema Maps Explorer Pack), but all entries submitted for May 2025 through to April 2026 will go in the running for an epic grand prize package worth almost $3600!*

Want to be in the running? It's simple! Send in your best travel-inspiring image of your rig, along with a brief description, to submissions@hemagroup.com.au. Just make sure your image is high quality and suitable for print (2–3Mb).

We'll still be awarding a monthly Readers' Rigs prize, but come May 2026, one standout submission will be crowned the ultimate winner – taking home an incredible prize bundle.

WHAT'S UP FOR GRABS?

Hema HX-2+ Navigator (Valued at $849.95)

Navigate with confidence on and off the beaten track with the Hema HX-2+ GPS Navigator. Now updated to include the innovative Hema 3D Explorer Map, turn-by-turn navigation and remote guidance. It is also pre-loaded with the all-new Hema Nav and Hema 4WD Maps powered by Memory Map© (subscription required), making it the ultimate tool for any Aussie adventurer. Find out more: hemamaps.com/pages/hx-2-plus-gps-navigator

Luxury stay at BIG4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park (Valued at $1180)

Enjoy a unique two-night escape in a beautifully restored 1930s tram at BIG4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park. This spacious accommodation sleeps up to eight guests across three ensuite bedrooms and features a full kitchen, TV, Euro laundry, private deck with barbecue and a wood-fired hot tub.

While there, make the most of the park's swimming pools, bike pump tracks and playground before venturing into the Yarra Valley and surrounds to discover breathtaking landscapes, native wildlife, world-class wineries and more.

Bookings exclude school and public holidays. Find out more: big4.com.au

A sunrise Yarra Valley hot ballooning experience (Valued at $990)

Take to the skies in the Yarra Valley with Global Ballooning weekday sunrise hot air experience for two. Global Ballooning has been operating for more than 33 years over Melbourne, Yarra Valley and Mansfield. Owned and operated by a fourth-generation aviation family, the company has flown more than 120,000 passengers and received thousands of five-star reviews.

Melbourne is the only major city in the world where you can traverse by hot air balloon, while the Yarra Valley and Mansfield provide stunning aerial views and the chance to spot native wildlife, including kangaroos, at sunrise. Find out more: globalballooning.com.au

T&Cs apply:

- Valid to book within 12 months until May 2027
- Non-refundable
- Valid for Monday–Friday bookings (excl. public holidays)
- Valid for two people (must be booked together)

GME MT610G Personal Locator Beacon (Valued at $429)

Having reliable communication equipment is essential for your safety when travelling Australia, and the GME MT610G 406MHz GPS Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) is super compact and offers an impressive seven-year battery life and six-year warranty.

Featuring an integrated 72-channel GPS receiver, high-intensity LEDs, IP68 ingress protection and an inherently buoyant design (perfect for boating or swimming activities), the MT610G is designed to meet and exceed the latest international standards, ensuring enhanced peace of mind for the outdoor adventurer. Find out more: gme.net.au

12-MONTH SUBSCRIPTION TO *CARAVAN WORLD* (VALUED AT $150)

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A HUGE THANKS TO OUR SPONSORS

A massive shoutout to Hema Maps, Park Lane Group, Global Ballooning and GME for making this competition possible!

So, grab your camera and start snapping those adventure-worthy shots for the chance to score the ultimate prize giveaway!

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE You can stay in a 1930s restored tram at BIG4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park; GME MT610G Personal Locator Beacon; Hema HX-2+ Navigator; Global Ballooning sunrise hot air balloon experience

ROYAL FLAIR CELEBRATES 50 YEARS WITH NEW MODELS

Royal Flair Caravans recently celebrated its 50th year in business with the release of two new rugged, offroad model vans unveiled with fanfare and fireworks at a festive party at its Melbourne headquarters.

Surviving 50 years in the caravan industry is no mean feat and Royal Flair managing director, Billy Deralas, believes that innovation, customer relationships and an unwavering commitment to quality over quantity are among the key ingredients to the company's success.

ROYAL FLAIR'S GROWTH

The business was established by his father Peter Deralas in 1975 as New Home Caravans in Reservoir, Victoria. In the early 1980s, Peter moved the business to Campbellfield, at a time when there were only about eight other caravan builders in the outer north suburb of Melbourne. He renamed the business Royal Flair in 1990.

By 2010, the number of manufacturers in the new Victorian mecca of van building had swelled to about 100 and Royal Flair had to start thinking outside the box, producing family and offroad vans as well as traditional touring models.

In the years that followed, Royal Flair's innovation turned the sector on its head. The distinctive Piazza model with its rear fold-out deck to create more outdoor living space is still one of Royal Flair's most popular models.

The Raptor was specifically designed for campers who like to take all their toys away with them: roof top storage for tinnies, dinghies and kayaks, and a rear fold-up tray for quad or dirt bikes.

Royal Flair was among the first to incorporate motorised lift-up beds – common in motorhomes – into caravans to increase the inside living space.

Other models in the range include Razor, Aussie Mate, Eco Mate, Family Flair and the Designer Series.

Royal Flair focuses on quality over quantity. Billy is producing about four to five vans per week and has no intention of increasing that output because he doesn't want to lose control of his quality as a custom builder.

And he walks the talk. Billy is a councillor on the Caravan Industry of Victoria board and has been instrumental in getting the recently launched RV Masters Manufacturers program off the ground.

His customer base is loyal. Many of them are return customers on their second and third caravans.

"I build a relationship with my clients," Billy said. "It's not just a purchase – it's a journey we go on together to make sure their van is personalised and tailored to meet their specific needs."

NEW MODELS FOR 2025

The two Royal Flair 2025 models launched on the night included the 19ft 6in Aussie Mate family van in a new khaki green exterior colour. Billy's son, Peter, brought this van along to Caravan of the Year 2025 so expect to read more about it in forthcoming editions of *Caravan World*.

With a front entry door, it features the roomiest corner triple bunks you'll ever seen in a van – big enough for lanky teenagers and small adults. The main bed at the rear sits out of the way on the ceiling over the spacious club lounge. When the adults want to go to bed, a flick of the switch and it magically appears. It's a great use of limited space.

The Razor XT in a new Dune exterior colour is another family van with more traditional double bunks up front and the lift-up bed over the club lounge at the rear.

Later this year, Billy will launch a 50th anniversary model based on ideas that have been in his head for years and as a legacy for his father, who passed away several years ago, and his hard work that made the company what it is today.

Attended by a who's who of the caravan industry, media and the company's 56 staff, the 50th anniversary party was held under a marquee in the front car park of Royal Flair's Epping headquarters. Overlooking the proceedings was a giant image of Peter Senior which had been erected the day before. And a framed picture of him sat proudly next to the birthday cake.

For more information about the Royal Flair 2025 models, head online: royalflair.com.au

ROYAL FLAIR
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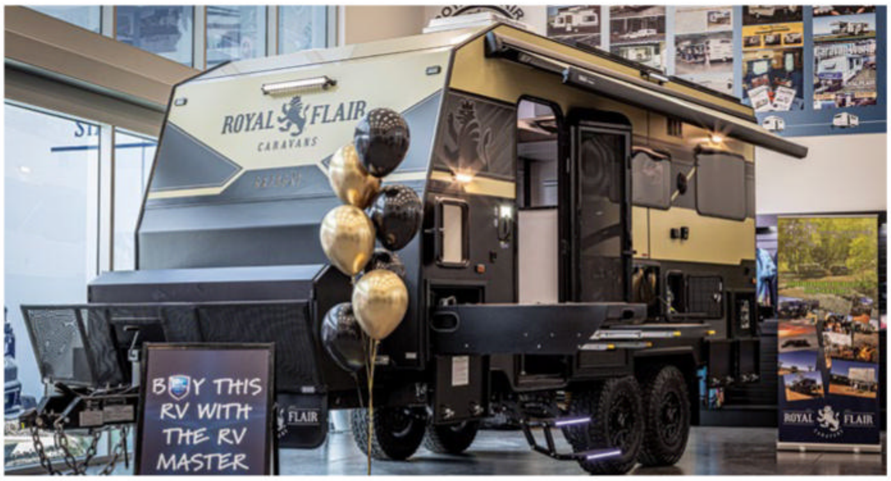

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The new Razor XT; Royal Flair's 50th celebration; Peter Senior's mural

WILLOW RV LAUNCHES ITS FIRST MOTORHOME

Based in Melbourne, Willow RV Caravans has made a name for itself in Australia's caravanning scene, recognised for its lightweight but robust vans that are designed for Aussie adventures. But there's some exciting news for Willow RV fans – the manufacturer has officially entered the motorhome market, marking a new chapter for the Aussie company.

Founders Ian Jow and Eddie Willis have aspired to expand Willow RV's range into motorhomes since they started the brand back in 2017. Both Ian and Eddie have extensive experience in motorhome manufacturing, having originally come to Australia for this very purpose in the early 2000s.

This expertise has played a key role in the development of Willow RV's newest offering: the Kauri 25 series motorhome.

Built on the Iveco 50C chassis cab, the Kauri 25 boasts:

- Rear-wheel drive
- 4495kg gross vehicle mass (GVM)
- Eight-speed automatic transmission
- Select models drivable on a standard car licence
- Three two-berth layouts, including slide-out options for maximised space
- Fully insulated, high-quality composite construction

At 25ft long (7.62m), the Kauri 25 is the first step in Willow RV's long-awaited expansion into the motorhome segment. With plans to broaden the range in coming years, Willow RV aims to establish itself as a major player in the Australian motorhome industry.

Willow RV has built a strong reputation for high-end craftsmanship in the caravan sector and that same commitment to quality will carry through to its motorhome range.

If you'd like to check out the new Willow RV Kauri 25 motorhome, visit the Willow RV showroom and manufacturing facility (69 Bald Hill Road, Pakenham, Vic 3810).

For more information, phone 1800 717 589 or head online: willowrv.com.au

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CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Spacious club lounge and lift-up bed; The new Kauri 25 series motorhome; Both Willow RV founders have a background in motorhome manufacturing; High-end interior

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2025 ISUZU MU-X:

TOW-READY WITH SOME SMART UPGRADES

LEFT TO RIGHT 2025 MU-X LS-T in Neptune Blue; Inside the new flagship X-TERRAIN variant; MU-X X-TERRAIN in Slate Grey

Isuzu has unveiled the 2025 MU-X, bringing a host of refinements aimed at making this SUV even more capable for towing, offroad adventures and daily use. With upgraded suspension, improved safety features and the introduction of the premium X-TERRAIN variant, the latest MU-X is set to meet the demands of Australian drivers.

X-TERRAIN: NEW FLAGSHIP VARIANT FOR 2025

The 2025 MU-X lineup introduces the new X-TERRAIN, a bold, high-spec model featuring a more aggressive exterior and a premium interior with red-accented leather seats. Having tested multiple X-TERRAIN D-MAXs over the years, we can say the black interior is a welcome addition to the MU-X range.

The X-TERRAIN also features an updated digital multi-information display (MID) and a 9in infotainment screen with wireless smartphone connectivity. It builds on the LS-T 4x4 with additional styling and feature enhancements.

TOWING-FOCUSED ENHANCEMENTS

Towing practicality has been improved with an upgraded tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS), now displaying real-time pressure and temperature to help drivers maintain optimal performance under load. A 360-degree surround view monitor, available on LS-T and X-TERRAIN models, simplifies trailer hitching and tight-spot manoeuvring.

The MU-X now features an enhanced digital reversing camera with a built-in hitch guide for easier alignment with caravans and trailers. The Intelligent Adaptive Cruise Control (IACC) has also been refined to incorporate traffic sign recognition, enhancing safety and offering smoother speed adjustments on long drives.

ADVANCED DRIVER ASSISTANCE AND SAFETY UPGRADES

The 2025 MU-X benefits from a significantly updated Advanced Driver Assistance System (ADAS). The new ‘Gen4’ stereo camera provides a wider field of view and improved object detection, enhancing safety in a variety of driving conditions.

New additions include Rear Cross Traffic Brake (RCTB) – which can automatically engage the brakes when reversing to prevent collisions – and Traffic Jam Assist (TJA), designed to maintain speed and lane position in slow-moving traffic. Lane Keep Assist (LKA) has been refined for smoother steering inputs, while the updated digital reversing camera now includes a hydrophobic coating to improve visibility in poor weather conditions.

SUSPENSION AND HANDLING IMPROVEMENTS

The MU-X’s suspension system has been reworked with larger dampers and revised shock absorbers, enhancing ride comfort and stability – especially when towing. Locally tested to handle Australia’s diverse road conditions, the improvements provide better control on highways and unsealed roads.

A rear differential lock, standard on 4x4 models, improves traction in challenging conditions, while the recalibrated Rough Terrain Mode optimises wheel slip to maintain stability when towing or driving on uneven surfaces.

ENGINE AND TOWING CAPACITY

The MU-X continues to offer two diesel engine options: a 1.9L (110kW/350Nm) for efficiency and a 3L (140kW/450Nm) for those requiring more power. Both engines are paired with a six-speed automatic transmission, available in 4x2 or 4x4.

The 3L 4x4 remains the preferred choice for towing, with a 3500kg braked towing capacity.

INTERIOR AND INFOTAINMENT UPDATES

Inside, the MU-X sees several functional upgrades. A 9in infotainment screen (available in LS-U, LS-T and X-TERRAIN) now includes an inclinometer and terrain command controls for offroad driving. Responding to customer feedback, Isuzu has also reintroduced a physical volume knob for easier audio adjustments.

OFFROAD CAPABILITIES FOR REMOTE TRAVEL

For those heading off the beaten track, the MU-X offers solid offroad credentials. With up to 235mm of ground clearance, an 800mm wading depth and approach and departure angles designed for uneven terrain, it remains a capable option for remote touring. The vehicle’s electronic traction control and offroad driving aids ensure stability and control when towing in rough conditions.

PRICING AND AVAILABILITY

The 2025 Isuzu MU-X is available in Australian dealerships as of 1 March 2025, with prices starting at $46,990 drive-away for the LS-M 4x2. The top-spec X-TERRAIN 3L is priced at $73,990. Isuzu continues to offer a six-year/150,000km warranty and five years of capped-price servicing. (Please note, prices may vary between states and territories.)

With smarter towing technology, refined suspension and the addition of the X-TERRAIN model, the 2025 MU-X strengthens its position as a capable and reliable SUV for tow vehicle buyers.

Head online for more information: isuzuute.com.au

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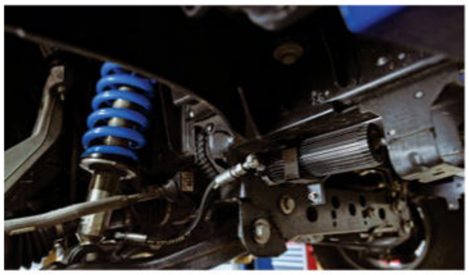

CLOCKWISE FROM FROM LEFT Lovells' new 4000kg GVM upgrade for Ford Rangers; The upgrade enhances a vehicle's weight-carrying capacity

With caravans getting bigger and heavier, it's important to make sure your towing setup remains safe. To help with that, Lovells Automotive Systems has launched a significant upgrade for the Ford Ranger, boosting its gross vehicle mass (GVM) to 4000kg.

This new Lovells upgrade is now available across the full range of 4x4 Ford Ranger models, including the 2L bi-turbo, inline-four and 3L V6 turbo-diesel variants. The move follows the company's recent introduction of a four-tonne Brake Towing Capacity (BTC) upgrade for the Ford Ranger V6 turbo-diesel model.

Designed to improve the Ranger's load-carrying capacity, the GVM upgrade provides an additional 720kg of payload. This enhancement makes the Ranger more suited to a variety of demanding roles, from trades and emergency services to leisure and recreational uses, where extra load-bearing capacity is essential.

The upgrade includes eight-way adjustable remote reservoir shock absorbers, designed and engineered locally to maintain the vehicle's ride comfort even with the increased weight. Additionally, optional uprated upper control arms are available to complement the upgrade for both drivetrain variants.

Mike Davison, managing director of Lovells Automotive Systems, commented on the new offering: "Our four-tonne GVM upgrades are specifically engineered for local conditions to improve the safety and practicality of the Ford Ranger. Whether it's for work equipment or family adventure gear, this upgrade ensures that users can trust their vehicles to carry heavy loads with ease and confidence."

ENSURING SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE

With an increasing number of vehicles on the road being overloaded or improperly loaded, safety remains a top concern for drivers, particularly when towing. For those who need extra weight-carrying capability, a GVM upgrade can not only enhances the vehicle's carrying capacity but also helps ensure compliance with legal weight limits.

The Lovells 4000kg GVM upgrade has been rigorously tested to meet Australian Government standards, ensuring compliance with both federal (pre-registration) and state (post-registration) regulations, offering peace of mind for owners concerned about overloading and the potential consequences of non-compliance.

KEY DETAILS:

- **GVM upgrade to 4000kg:** Available for Ford Ranger 2L bi-turbo inline-four 3.0 V6 Diesel 4x4 models (2022 onwards), including Super Cab Chassis, Double Cab Chassis and Double Cab Pick-up configurations.
- **Quick installation:** Fitting the upgrade can take less than a day.
- **Nationwide support:** Available through Lovells' franchises and authorised dealers across Australia, with comprehensive after-sales support and spare parts.

To find out more about the Lovells 4000kg GVM upgrade, pricing and packages, head online: lovellsauto.com.au

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CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2025

With MALCOLM STREET

Malcolm has returned from judging Caravan of the Year 2025 and notes some emerging trends.

I'm not long back from the Caravan of the Year (COTY) event for 2025. It was undoubtedly a period of intense activity for the *Caravan World* crew – judges, photographers and videographers – as well as the dealers and manufacturers who came along. It was a case of information overload, and it took a couple of days to process everything and get my notes in order after I returned home.

No secrets to be revealed yet, of course, but there were a few pointers as to where the caravan industry might be heading. Technology is rising with ever-increasing lithium LiFePO4 battery capacities, solar panel power and inverter ratings. As was predicted from the last COTY, composting toilets are becoming more common, thus resolving the self-sustainability and water limitations associated with cassette toilets.

It may be a trend that no one turned up with a meranti timber frame caravan and, with one exception (ply timber sheeting), all had an aluminium frame or a full composite structure. Maybe we asked the right questions at the last COTY because most contenders were better prepared for the customer care (warranty) questions, but industry wide, I'd suggest that 'could do better' still applies.

ABOVE AND RIGHT Malcolm needed his LR licence to tow this beast; Frontline's Hi-top campervan has a stylish look

A fair number of the COTY 2025 contenders turned up with large US trucks for towing, even when they weren't really needed. For the first time in my caravan towing years, I needed my Light Rigid truck licence to tow one of the vans. It's more common in motorhomes I have reviewed, but one of the Silverado tow vehicles had a GVM upgrade to 6000kg, which required a truck licence.

Unintentionally, we judges spent almost more time analysing the tow vehicle's capability and ride (primarily because of their unfamiliarity) than the ride of the caravans on the back. Not that there were any real problems. One particular feature grabbed my attention. Several of the Chevrolet Silverados had a camera down the side of the vehicle, which operated with the indicator. It was handy when going around corners, but it didn't stay on long enough when completing the turn. On a related matter, far too many contenders didn't see the need to fit appropriate towing mirrors.

LIGHT WEIGHT MOTORHOMING

Away from the caravan sector, not so long ago I took a Frontline Adventurer campervan for a test run. Campervans were once very common in the world of motorhomes. However, these days, they are more often seen in the fleets of rental motorhome companies or people who still like getting around in Volkswagen Transporter or Toyota HiAce conversions. Frontline is an old hand in the campervan business and, for the most part, produces pop-top conversions. However, in recent times it has made a fibreglass Hi-top version – no lifting the roof every night. Frontline has done a neat job with the fibreglass moulding; it doesn't just look like someone stuck a box on top. The HiAce is powered by a 2.8L turbo diesel engine and, in my case, mated to a six-speed manual gearbox. Unusual these days, it was a fun drive when most vehicles have automatic gearboxes. I haven't driven a manual in quite a few years and enjoyed my couple of days cruising around the Southern Highlands area of NSW – everything from freeways to winding mountain roads.

There's not a big variation in campervan designs and Frontline's Adventurer layout was used in my review van. It has a seat/bed in the rear, with a kitchen bench along the offside wall. A benefit of this layout is that it's easy to carry two extra passengers without a problem. Campervans like this really aren't designed to tour Australia with all the comforts. However, they are great for lightweight travel and short-term trips.

Naturally, there are no ensuite facilities, but a portable loo is an option, and there's an external shower at the rear. It's ideal for places like national parks with few basic facilities. A downside of the Hi-top is that access to places like underground car parks is more limited than a pop-top, but the upside is that there's a bit more shelf space up top. In addition, it still fits into many standard car parking spaces, something beneficial at the supermarket.

Fancy a bit of lightweight, no-stress travel? The Frontline Adventurer Hi-top might be just the vehicle!

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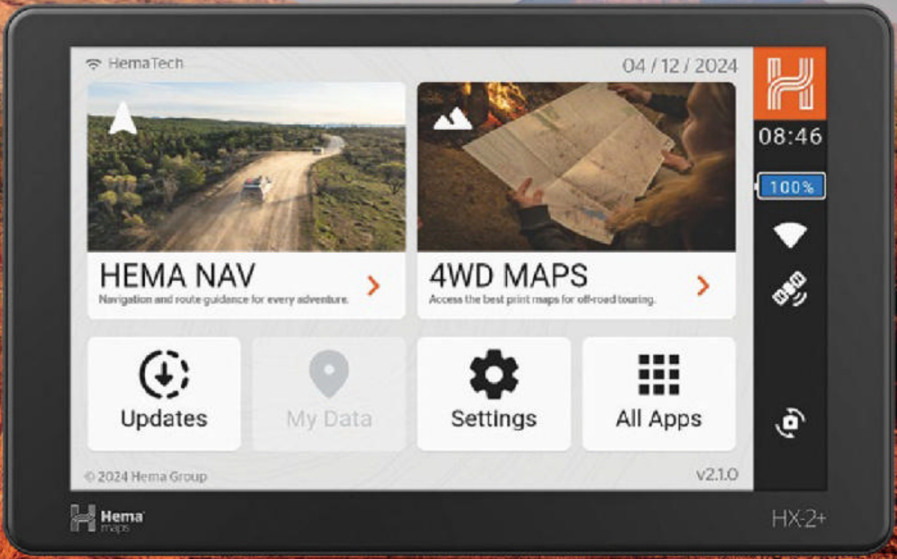
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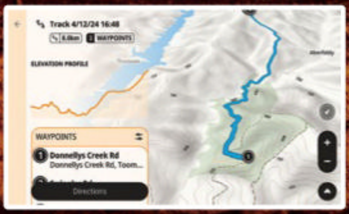
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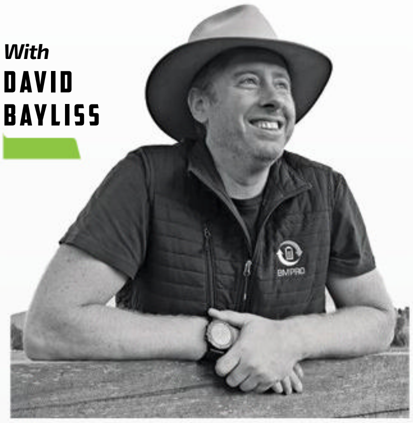

This month David answers a question from a reader about how to keep their caravan cool when the AC is out of action while off-grid camping.

Q Hey 12V Guru,

Our caravan is an off-grid van, but we can't run the air-conditioner for long. What can we do to fix this?

It's a 2016 Jayco StarCraft with 180W solar panels and two 140Ah batteries.

Cheers,
Teena and Tim Goodes
(Newbies to living full-time on the road)

A Hi Teena and Tim,

It's great that you have the opportunity to live life on the road — it can be an exciting adventure — but staying comfortable in hot weather can be a challenge, especially if you're hoping to run your air-conditioner while travelling. With limited solar power and AGM batteries, it's important to understand your energy consumption and explore options to improve efficiency.

There are a few key factors to consider to help you get up and running with AC. In order of priority, consider how much energy your air-conditioner uses and whether you should upgrade to lithium batteries and charger, add solar panels or use a DC-DC charger.

Most caravan air-conditioners are 240V units that require between 1000 and 2000 watts (1–2kW) of power, depending on their size and efficiency. If you're running it from a 12V battery system, you'll need an inverter to convert 12V DC power into 240V AC power. To give an idea of the battery draw, a 2000W air-conditioner at full power on a 12V system will need roughly 160–170 amps per hour from your battery bank, especially if the van is already hot inside. Once the van cools down, it will cycle using less power. With a battery bank of 280Ah, and only using up to 50 per cent capacity, your batteries will be flat in about an hour. Even with solar panels replenishing some charge, it's unlikely you'll be able to run the air-conditioner for long without additional charging sources.

I imagine that the air-conditioner, being less efficient than newer versions, will not be kind to the lifespan of your batteries.

With AGM batteries and a limited number of solar panels, your system is likely designed for running lights, fans and a fridge — not high-powered appliances like an air-conditioner.

So, to run the air-conditioner when off the grid, you'll need more energy storage and charging capacity. Here are your best options:

1. Upgrade to lithium batteries: Lithium batteries have higher usable capacity (they can be discharged to 90 per cent versus AGM's 50 per cent) and can handle higher discharge rates, making them better suited for running an air-conditioner. A 400Ah lithium battery bank would give you significantly more runtime than an equivalent AGM setup — roughly three times more than your current capacity.

2. Add more solar panels: You'll need a larger solar array. A 2000W air-conditioner will require at least 800–1200W of solar panels to run efficiently. More solar means recharging your batteries faster and keeping the air-conditioner running longer. Since roof space is limited, you might also consider portable solar panels or solar blankets to boost your charging capability when stationary.

3. Install a DC-DC charger: While driving, you can use your vehicle's alternator to charge your batteries using a DC-DC charger. These chargers convert power from your vehicle's alternator into a suitable voltage for charging your house batteries. They help keep your batteries topped up while driving, reducing reliance on solar alone. A 40A DC-DC charger can significantly improve your charging ability and extend the runtime of your air-conditioner.

4. Check if your charger is suitable: Hopefully, your charger will be able to handle lithium battery charging requirements. Most Jayco vans in 2016 had a BMPRO system installed, many of which are upgradeable without removing the entire system. When increasing your solar and battery setup, you must consider upgrading your fusing and cabling to handle the additional current.

Running an air-conditioner solely on battery power for extended periods can be problematic. Making these suggested should give you a more efficient setup for life on the road. Happy cool travels!

12V Guru

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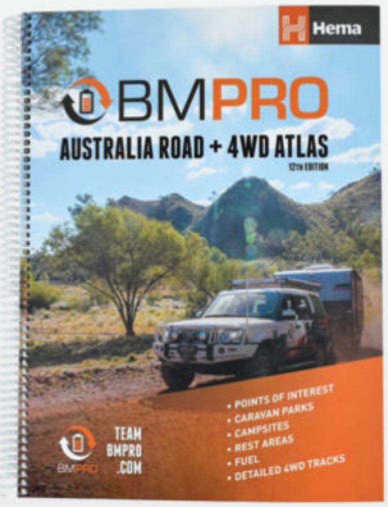

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WHAT CARAVANNING MEANS TO AUSTRALIA

This month, the Caravan Industry Association of Australia reflects on the upcoming federal election and highlights the critical role of caravanning in regional Australia.

Federal elections are always an interesting time. They pose periods of uncertainty as parties identify their best path to victory but also spur your individual thinking around what the future could look like. As I sit here pondering this year's federal election, it leaves me with a couple of questions. As the CEO of Caravan Industry Association of Australia (CIAA), I wonder about how the industry is viewed in the halls of power, and how important caravanning is in the broader industrial contribution to Australia.

I mean, I know the figures – $27 billion of economic contribution, no small figure – but is it enough for its capabilities to be considered important by policy makers?

As I mull this over, I'm reminded that we are one of the largest sovereign vehicle manufacturing industries remaining in the country, if not the largest. In 2017, we saw the last of large-scale manufacturing in the country – largely driven out by large costs to produce. I wish I could say that the environment for manufacturing in this country has improved since then, but sadly that would be incorrect. We've seen decisions by the people in power that have actively flown in the face of nurturing manufacturing in this country in any area other than what I refer to as the 'sexy six'. We've seen policies and funds roll out under the guise of rebuilding Australia; policies enacted to move us towards an environment where we can dominate manufacturing once again. All this is done while ignoring industries that are currently manufacturing – the grassroot industries that are keeping this country going.

I get to see firsthand every day the impact our industry has – not just on travellers, but on small businesses, local jobs and entire communities. Caravanning has been part of the Aussie way of life for more than a century, and today it's bigger than ever, supporting everyone from caravan builders and repairers to park owners and small-town cafe operators. With nearly 90 per cent of caravanning trips ending up in a regional area, chances are the money you spend on a holiday goes directly towards a community that gets hit harder with cost of living than any metro area. I've met cafe owners who tell me hand on heart: "If it weren't for caravanners, we'd have shut down years ago." I've spoken to servo operators who rely on road-trippers to get through the quiet months. And let's not forget about the people behind the scenes – the 50,000+ industry workers who make it all possible. Each and every one of those people depends on the success of our industry, which is why it's so critical that the government works with us to secure the road ahead.

Yet, despite our contributions, our industry continues to be overlooked in key policy discussions. The question is: Why? Why does a $27 billion industry that sustains regional economies, supports jobs and keeps Australian manufacturing alive continue to see policies rolled out that actively go against our own best interests? We have no objection to supporting policies such as future fuels transition and new energy horizons, these are a must. In order for Australians to continue to support our beautiful environment we need to ensure we protect it. In saying this, we cannot abandon the industries that have got us to the strong economic position that we currently enjoy.

The past three years have been challenging as we have seen costs rise across the board for all Australians, the cost to do business has also increased – energy, insurance and wage costs have seen businesses operating on the smell of an oily rag. If ever there was an opportune time for government and private enterprise to come together to, to work on how to reduce costs for business and therefore reduce costs for all Australians, the time is now. To work on ways of making industry more effective and efficient in times when the operating environment around them has seen anything but.

In recent times we have seen the success of the recently finalised Caravan Park Infrastructure Grants, where more than 100 parks received critical funding to introduce new projects which support their communities and the travelling public. The grants were an overwhelming success with high industry interest and much needed investment to regional tourism. This is just one example of how industry and government can work together to deliver positive outcomes for the country. We need long term vision for our industry, and we're ready to answer the call once government comes to the table.

As we head into this federal election, it is an opportune time to reflect on how we got to being the country we are today; and it's time to take a hard look at what industries like ours bring to the table. We need real practical announcements that support local manufacturing, investment in regional infrastructure which will not only benefit the industry but also caravanners and road-trippers, recognising the vital role we play in keeping regional Australia thriving. It's time to step up, invest and ensure that caravanning continues to thrive – for travellers, for communities and for the future of Australia.

Because when we support caravanning, we don't just support an industry. We support Australia.

Stuart Lamont
Chief Executive Officer

Caravan Industry
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LETTER
OF THE
MONTH

ALLOY RIMS ON OFFROAD VANS

Hi John,

I want to highlight an issue that I have discovered is very common yet not highlighted often enough in discussion forums. It concerns the use of alloy rims on vans marketed as 'offroad capable', particularly single axle offroad vans.

My 'fully offroad capable van' was fitted with alloy rims to all four wheels, two on-road and two spares, and in less than 12 months I had three rims fail in the way of a four-inch split to the barrel of the rim. The only rim that didn't fail did not have any road time.

A quick search of the Facebook pages for my van manufacturer owner groups revealed that this was a common issue experienced by those venturing off the blacktop.

I made the mistake of having the rims repaired, which cost me around $300 each time until I spoke to one of the engineering workshops who advised me that repairing the rims was not a good idea, as the rims had obviously been stressed beyond their design limits.

He stated that the damaged rims could suffer a second, and possibly catastrophic failure, and completely collapse. This is certainly not an outcome that I would like to experience at 100km/h.

I have since dumped the alloy rims and fitted steel rims to all four wheels at a cost of around $150 a rim.

Here are the figures for my van and the supplied rims:

- Van GTM: 2500kg
- Alloy rim load rating: 1350kg each, this gives a total load rating of 2700kg over the two wheels on the road

As you can see the combined rim load rating is only 200kg above the GTM figure.

Speaking to the rim manufacturer, its load ratings are for on highway use, and they do not have an offroad rating, yet still the van manufacturers fit them to vans marketed as fully offroad capable.

Talking to an engineer at a major suspension company regarding the shock loading on the running gear of a van on corrugated dirt roads, he said that it was impossible to give a definitive figure, however it could be as much as three to five times higher, compared to the load experienced on smooth bitumen roads. This makes my 200kg buffer look ridiculously small when you consider the shock loading weight on a single rim could be up to 6250kg as you bounce from corrugation to corrugation. That's 4900kg over the rim's design load rating.

So, in summary this is just a warning to anyone looking at single axle fully offroad capable vans, to be aware that the stylish alloy rims supplied as standard on these vans may not be up to the task if you are seriously looking at venturing off the blacktop. Some consideration should be given to fitting steel rims in place of the factory supplied alloy rims.

Just as a point of interest, the steel rims I purchased have a load rating of 1450kg, so only 100kg per rim over the alloy rims, however in the three years of full-time travel and thousands of kilometres on dirt roads since fitting the steel rims, I have not had one issue with them.

Safe travels.

Regards,
Andrew Rossi

A *Hi Andrew,*

Thanks for bringing this up. If other owners experienced the same issue, it appears that the manufacturer may have produced a batch of faulty wheels. Various manufacturing methods yield different results and levels of quality. Gravity-cast wheels can be porous, featuring pinholes in the structure, creating defects that aren't immediately visible but may lead to cracks and failures in the wheel. Due to these holes, these wheels can even lose tyre pressure. It's not advisable to repair such an alloy wheel.

Better-quality wheels, like the Monster AMMOs on our LandCruiser, are flow-forged and much stronger. I'm told they are tested at five times their rated weight.

When it comes to wheels and tyres, my go-to spiritual adviser is John Kulikowski from Bob Jane T-Mart because he knows everything there is to know about the subject. John observed that alloy wheels can take 16 times more force to crack than steel ones before they bend, so they are stronger. He told me that some lesser-quality wheels aren't correctly rated to their stamped value, so beware of generic brands.

Readers might be interested in some of his general recommendations. He suggested that 70psi is too high for a caravan tyre, preferring blacktop running at around mid-40psi because overinflation can cause alloy wheels to fail. His experience has been that overinflation is a major cause of wheel failure. The maximum rating on the tyre is just that – a maximum value and shouldn't be used as a recommendation for general use. For corrugated roads, he recommends 20psi.

I hope this helps,
John

GCM UPGRADE MESS

✉ Dear John,

I have just read your GVM upgrade article, taking careful note of not being able to increase the GCM. In Western Australia they put an amendment to the Vehicle Act via VTB181-A which allows for GCM upgrades to light vehicles under 4.5 tonne.

So, I applied and got rejected and so did everyone else. After lots of research I found out there's a special Dyno machine used to test vehicles for their ability to handle a GCM upgrade, however this machine is in the eastern states. Which means VTB181-A isn't worth the paper it's written on. Another political stunt by the Labor Party prior to the election in March. Over here in WA this has become the number one topic in the 4WD and caravan communities with literally thousands of people who are overweight because of this nonsense. Why can't we have a uniform law for all Australians not just those in the eastern states? It is bureaucracy gone completely overboard which is compromising road safety. It would be great if your magazine could research this and make some noise on this subject. Look forward to seeing something from you soon.

Kind regards,
Phillip Robinson

A *Hi Phillip,*

The rules in WA are being reconsidered, and you are right that it looks like a real mess. Every organisation and supplier has a different opinion on how things should progress, but there isn't a solution that will happen soon despite existing Federal compliance laws. The state regulators must get moving because the situation has been chaotic since 2018. Even interstate travellers with gross combined mass (GCM) approvals can get caught up with the policing, so travellers unsure about their GCM's legality in WA should check before towing to the west coast.

Graham Cawley from the West Australian Motor Traders Association told me his organisation has been lobbying the state transport department to finalise the rules. He anticipates an outcome in mid-2025. Suspension manufacturers hope the state will adopt the federal procedures and dispense with the complicated state proposals.

It's worth noting that future GCM guidelines for already registered vehicles will not allow for an increased braked towing capacity (BTC), so a 200 Series LandCruiser will be limited to a 3500kg van. I'm told a pre-registration GVM complies under federal approval.

Cheers,
John

FIRST DIBS UNFAIR

✉ Hi John,

I would like to voice my opinion on the very annoying practice of caravan parks allowing people to have the first offer to rebook the same site for, let's say next Christmas year after year. How does that seem fair?

I think it should be compulsory to allow guests to have two years at the same site then you are done, and you are out. This would then give all of us the chance to visit different locations and enjoy the caravanning lifestyle.

Regards,
Chris Smythe

A *Hi Chris,*

I'm not sure we can influence caravan park owners' booking systems. Perhaps they see value in rewarding loyalty, which isn't a bad thing generally. Pressures on popular holiday destinations will only get worse as the population grows, so we might have to get used to travelling in quieter times when things are less frenetic, and you can even get a coffee at the local cafe in a reasonable time.

Cheers,
John

THE ISSUE OF SNORING

✉ Hi John,

I'm recently retired and keen to start the caravan road. My wife is not quite on board. The biggest obstacle is snoring (both of us, but she has a throat condition).

We often have to sleep separately. I would love to hear any suggestions from your readers (we can't be the only ones).

Regards,
Jamsie

A *Wow Jamsie,*

Yes, caravans offer a little sanctuary when a partner snores. It sounds like a double CPAP machine might do the trick, but a trip to the sleep therapy clinic will advise on how successful this might be.

I hope you can find a solution.

Safe travels,
John

WIN! THIS NEW PRIZE FOR MAY
TIEGEAR PACK

☞ To help you prepare for your upcoming dry season adventures, we're offering an exciting prize for the winner of Letter of the Month in the May issue of Caravan World: a TIEGEAR Caravan Pack.

The TIEGEAR Caravan Pack comes with two 4m reflective guy ropes (with attached mesh bag to store excess) and two soft springs for fast and easy securing of your caravan awning. The pack also comes with a sturdy mesh zippered gear bag to keep everything neat and tidy when not in use. It's a very handy bit of gear to have in your caravanning setup.

How to win

☞ Simply send your technical, towing or caravan-related questions or advice and great travel stories to **submissions@hemagroup.com.au** with 'Postbag' or 'Tech Talk' in the subject line or send a letter to Caravan World Postbag, 3 Wyman Place, Braeside, Vic 3195. All entries must include your full address (not for publication).

SEND PICS TO WIN

TRAVEL HAPPY

We shine the spotlight on caravanners, their rigs and their travel tales.

→ **Andrew Rossi sent in this month's winning pic of his rig at sunset in the company of a magnificent river red gum at Mount Little Station in South Australia.**
"Three and a half years on the road around Australia was an amazing experience with our 16ft 6in Nova Terra Sportz and LandCruiser 200 Series proving to be an outstanding combination."

→ **Greg and Karen Dagge sent in this pic while on holiday in Moama, NSW.**
"My wife and I have been holidaying for 30 years to different destinations. Our latest van is a 2006 Crusader Dreamtime pop-top which we restored, towed by our 2006 Jeep Grand Cherokee limited 3L turbo diesel."

→ **Colleen McCutcheon and Rick Gibbons sent in this pic of their Ford Ranger and Conqueror UEV 490 hybrid at Sandy Point Campground, WA.**
"We camped here for two days when Broome was booked out."

→ **Ray and Pam Blick took this picture of their rig, a Nova Bravo 19ft 6in towed with a Ford Ranger on the banks of the Gwydir River at Bingara, NSW.**
"When the river is flowing it supplies water for cotton growing further downstream. It is a very tranquil place to stop."

WIN!

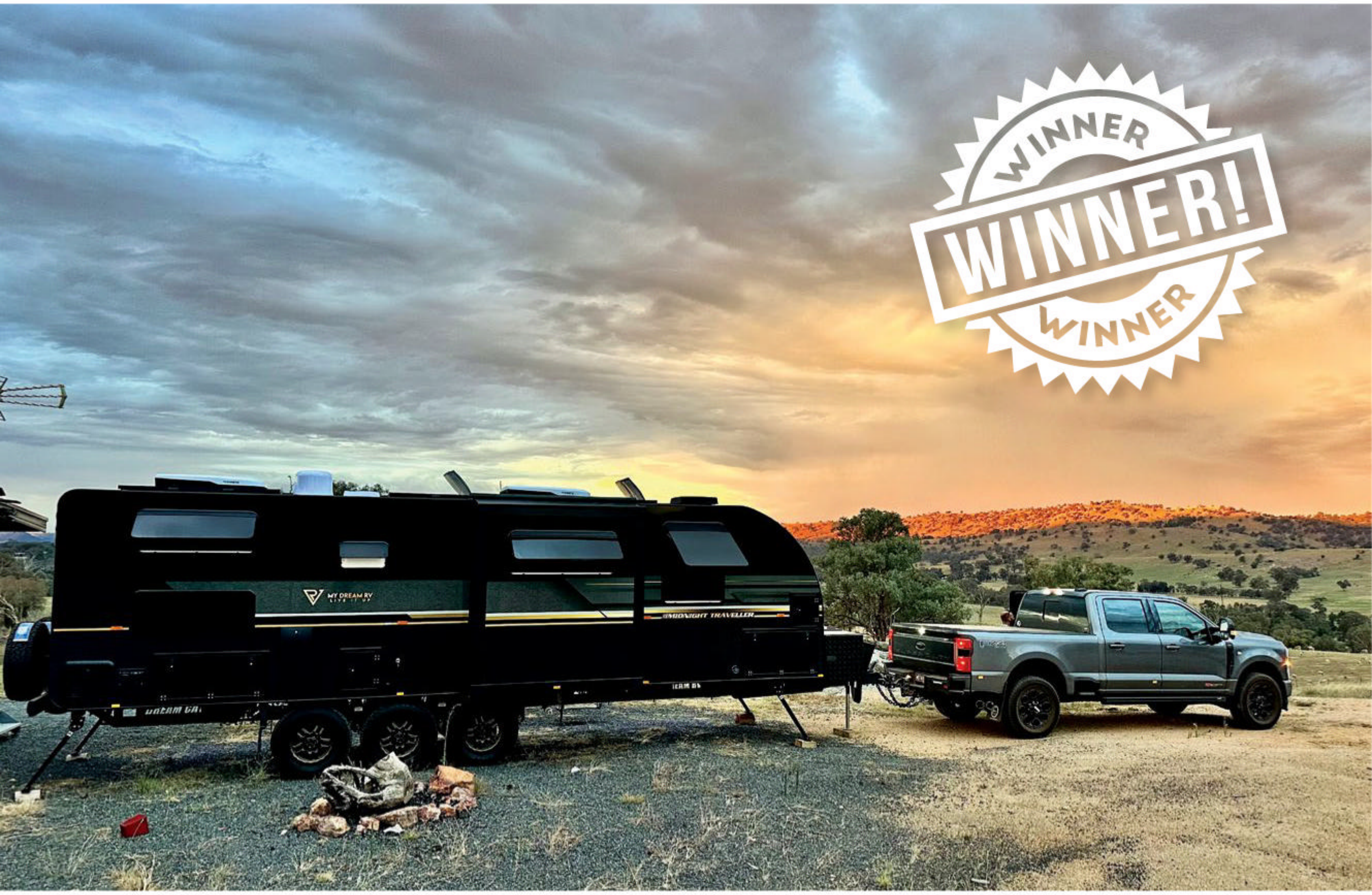
NEW PRIZE FOR MAY!

We're introducing a new and exciting prize for Readers Rigs' next month! From May onwards the monthly winner will receive a random **Hema Maps Explorer Pack** featuring handy atlases, guides and region and state/territory maps with a handy fabric wallet to keep it all organised. **For more information about the Hema Maps Explorer Packs and other bundles, visit hemamaps.com**

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
ROAD & 4WD TRACK ATLAS
4WD+CAMPING
Escapes
Perth
Western Australia

Adam and Giulia Zummer sent in this month's winning pic of their 26.5ft My Dream RV van on its maiden voyage, parked up at a friend's farm in Cowra, NSW, after a week-long stay at Wyangala Dam.

"It was just us and our two kids, Dekoda and Natalia. It was beautiful to sit and watch the sunset every night. With the big rig and F Truck, it gave me those Arizona feels. Can't wait to travel Australia and watch many more sunsets in our beautiful country."



HOW TO WIN

☛ Just email your most travel-inspiring picture (2-3Mb) of yourself, family or friends with your rig along with a brief description to **submissions@hemagroup.com.au** with 'Readers' Rigs' in the subject line, or send a print to Caravan World Readers' Rigs, 3 Wyman Place, Braeside Vic 3195. All entries must include your full postal address (not for publication). Photo submissions may also appear on *Caravan World* socials and caravanworld.com.au

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Position 2

Position 3

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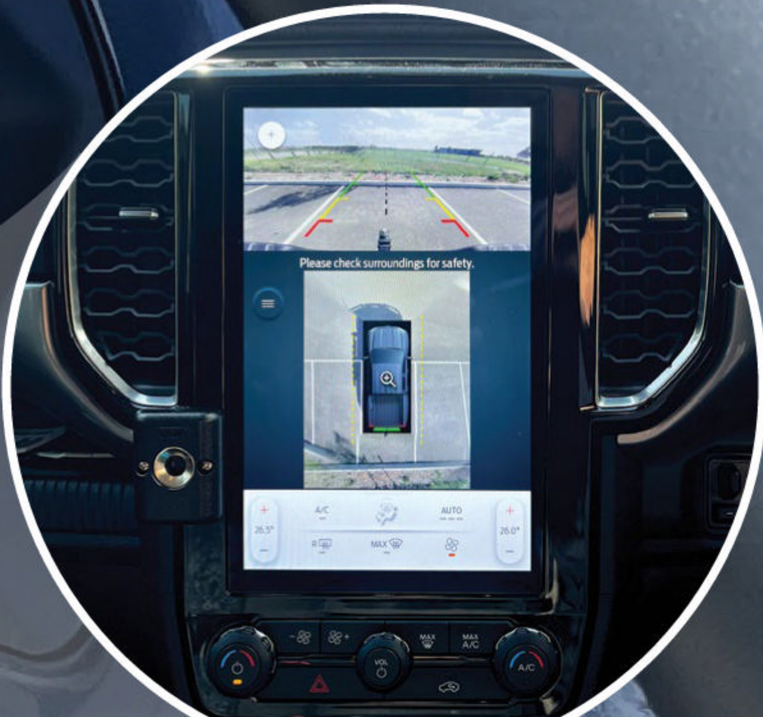

Ford Ranger PY Model Shown

CAMERA PROVISION*

Headset display will provide the same view as the existing factory fitted mirrors.

**Selected vehicle models ONLY.*

MSA prides itself on being at the leading edge of industry trends and it is our vision to stay there. The camera feature in towing mirrors, has long been a topic of discussion in the 4WD, caravanning and adventure industry. The MSA team has recently finalised the implementation of the camera provision into the highly popular MSA POWER FOLD™ Towing Mirrors Range.

These mirrors share the same SEMA award-winning, large single-mirror design that has made MSA Towing Mirrors so popular among 4WD and adventure enthusiasts. The only visual difference is the integration of the camera housing into the design. The mirror head pivots on a heavy-duty extension slide attached to a solid base and the extension slide allows the mirror to extend out when towing and return to a standard driving position, when not re equired. All MSA Towing Mirrors are ADR compliant, covered by a manufacturers 5 Year Warranty and available in black or chrome.

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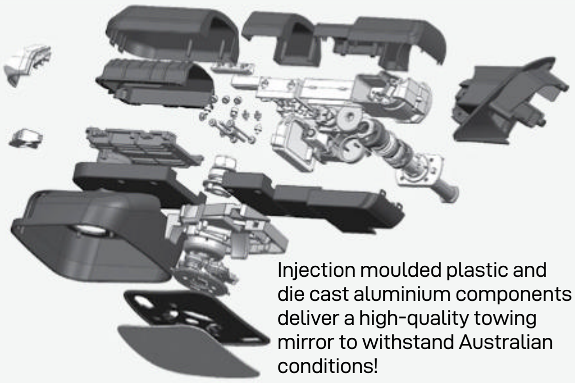

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- Fold inwards or outwards
- ADR Compliant
- Injection moulded plastic and die-cast aluminium components

VALUE TO BE FOUND AT THE VICTORIAN CARAVAN SHOW

Editor John Ford visited the recent Victorian Caravan and Camping Supershow in Melbourne and discovered there were some bargains to be found for savvy buyers.

***Words and Pics** John Ford*

THE SHOW APP
WONDERLAND RV
SNOWY RIVER
BIGGEST & BEST
WONDERLAND RV
ZONE RV

ABOVE Big crowds lined up to enter the 2025 Victorian Caravan and Camping Supershow over the weekend

MY DREAM RV
LIVE IT UP
NULLARBOR
DREAM RV
VE IT UP
SOLAR CITY
MARINE & CARAVANS

ABOVE My Dream RV Caravans now has an aluminium frame

The Victorian Caravan and Camping Supershow kicks off the major RV show circuit each year, and this year's five-day event attracted 43,749 visitors who braved the 33-degree temperatures and an afternoon thunderstorm on the last day.

The show is open to caravan builders with dealers in Victoria, so most brands showcase their latest and best offerings. This year, more than 1100 caravans and RVs were featured on site. Like most years, the big offroad vans were the main attractions, and they continue to roll out across many brands. However, with the cost of living a factor for many buyers, I thought it was time to research the value propositions in caravans.

The Melbourne show is one of the biggest, being home to the Victorian caravan industry, and it took me a good two days to explore what was on offer. As well as seeking out some bargains, I was keen to uncover trends. Because of other commitments, we went to the show on the weekend and, as I expected, it was busy.

Many dealers reported that sales were slower than last year, even if most brands seemed to be meeting targets. Despite many commentators advising against buying at shows because of the risk of being talked into something inappropriate, the show scene is a considerable part of dealer turnover, and there seemed to be deals all over the showground.

A trend that stood out was the move away from timber frames. Notably, Goldstream RV's new composite construction has delivered a new lease of life to this well-respected brand. So, too, My Dream RV has turned the page with an aluminium frame and moved away from the rounded front profile. Wonderland RV also introduced an alloy version and a new build-your-dream caravan phone app.

WHAT CAN YOU BUY SUB $100K?

Pre-COVID, a $100,000 van was expensive. Today, the market has moved, and we now see models at three times that price point. New buyers can be easily discouraged when they see the price of vans, not realising the boutique nature of the industry and the complexities of modern construction. So, it was encouraging to find that budget-conscious buyers have plenty from which to choose, and here are some standouts.

ALPHA RTV
Van Cruiser
$89,990

ABOVE AND BELOW The Van Cruiser Alpha RTV is a practical size for couples and comes in under $100K; The Snowy River hybrid was put through its paces

> "Pre-COVID, a $100,000 van was expensive. *Today, the market has moved, and we now see models at three times that price point"*

Atlas Caravans had a 21ft 6in (6.6m) family offroader with a solid list of quality equipment including Cruisemaster XT suspension, 800W of solar, 300Ah lithium and a 224L compressor fridge for $99,750, so just sneaking into our list. Family vans may have gone off the boil recently as interest rates bite, so there might be some good buys in this sector of the market.

Out in the hybrid arena, Cub Campers introduced its new F14, a fusion between caravan and camper trailer. The low-profile design allows it to fit in most home garages, while the high-lift pop-top offers impressive head height. Starting at $74,990, the little Cub oozed quality from a builder with a long heritage of making robust campers. The F14 is an entrant in our Caravan of the Year 2025 event where it's bound to be a strong contender.

The 17ft (5.2m) Design RV Stryker-X is $86,455 with options such as an L-shaped lounge and drop-down table. The van is a composite clad over a meranti frame and it looked striking in the current go-to black and dark grey colour scheme.

SNOWY RIVER CARAVANS
DELMAS

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For more than 30 years, Goldstream has manufactured rugged offroad and touring vans from its Pakenham factory, and its recent shift from timber to composite construction has proven highly successful. While it also produces larger models, it has carved a niche with compact pop-tops, and the new 1500 Remote CP is a fantastic addition to the composite market. Priced at a $69,990 show special, it has been very popular with couples looking for a suitably sized van that doesn't require a monster truck.

The Great Aussie Caravans team always manages to bring something special to shows, and the stunning Tribal Gravity 196 drew plenty of attention from savvy families. At $90,589, it presented excellent value for a bunk van featuring 3.3T independent suspension and a solid starter pack of gear to get you off-grid. The appliances included a large fridge, washing machine and reverse-cycle air-conditioner. There was the option of two or three bunks.

Jayco is the country's largest builder and has a vast range of vans. Its monster display under the event big top had something for everyone, and I found some standouts in our search for value. I've been impressed with the All Terrain range since we tested early models across NSW' Snowy Mountains a decade ago. The latest versions in the new khaki livery

> *"The Great Aussie Caravans team always manages to bring something special to shows,* and the stunning Tribal Gravity 196 drew plenty of attention from savvy families"

WAS $76690
NOW $ 69990
REMOTE 1500 CP
GOLDSTREAM RV
CP
75 Bald Hill Road
Pakenham VIC 3810
Tel: (03) 5941 5571

ABOVE AND BELOW The Great Aussie Tribal Gravity family van; The Goldstream 1500 Remote CP doesn't need a monster truck to tow it are built for tough going and are of high quality throughout. The 16ft (4.9m) version is a practical size for getting into some more difficult to reach spots, and at a show special of $88,990 with an upgraded heater and a rear camera, it's worth serious consideration.

Even better value was the new Jayco Starcraft pop-top range. A 16ft couples version has a north-south bed, roomy lounge and a full-width ensuite. Aimed at blacktop touring and mainly caravan park holidays, the $49,690 price was a standout.

Legend Caravans is one of my favourite offroad van builders, and its upmarket vans typically command a premium price. So, I was surprised to see a Trackline Hybrid make it onto our budget list by $1000. The compact 15ft (4.8m) showcased Legend's versatility as it sat alongside one of the show's priciest vans, a 27ft (8.2m) triple-axle Tycoon slide-out priced at $232,000.

Melbourne builder Majestic Caravans is always a contender for well-priced, reliable build quality. The brilliant white 18ft 6in (5.7m) Knight SLE looked like a good deal at $74,940 for a couple wanting a tourer that could handle some dirt road travel. Twin lithium batteries and a basic solar starter pack would also allow time off-grid.

The new aluminium-framed offerings from My Dream RV adds another manufacturer to

TRACKLINE
OFF-ROAD
LEGEND CARAVANS
Last Day Show Special One Van Only
$49,000

KNIGHT SLE
18'6
MAJESTIC
FREE AUFocus DIESEL HEATER
HUGE SAVINGS
RRP $79990
SHOW SPECIAL
$74940
$74,940

ABOVE AND BELOW The Legend Trackline Hybrid made it onto John's list; The Majestic Knight SLE was a good deal

On The Move
CARAVANS
INFINITY 6.3F
$76,990

STARCRAFT
Jayco

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT New imported models from On The Move; Jayco Starcraft; Snowy River hybrid

an offroader buyers list. A Nullarbor 17-footer borrows a Trakmaster model name, but I guess we are running out of localities for branding. The single axle couples van came well equipped and landed with a reasonable tare of 2292kg for use with mid-range 4WD tow vehicles.

The last day of the show saw discounts appear on stock vans, and some deals looked pretty tempting. Olympic Caravans is one of our heritage brands, and its Brisbane-built fibreglass shell classics are sought by restorers. These days, the brand lives on in Melbourne, and the little traditionally built 15ft 6in (4.8m) blacktop tourer had a show deal price of $58,683, one of the cheapest at the event.

> "The last day of the show saw discounts appear on stock vans, *and some deals looked pretty tempting*"

Not to be outdone for value though was On The Move Caravans with its new range of imported Infinity and Galaxy touring vans. The team has transitioned the composite build to these semi-offroad versions, and at $76,990, the 20ft 7in (6.3m) family van looks like a winner in the value stakes. The 15ft 7in (4.8m) Galaxy has a torsion suspension under the automotive-style chassis, delivering a 1500kg weight for frugal towing and frugal buying at $54,990.

Building up to our second in top-selling sales across the country, Snowy River Caravans has expanded its range to pop-tops and hybrids and introduced the SRH-16F, a snazzy well-equipped couples adventurer for $63,990. The compact offroader will be a contender in our Caravan of the Year 2025 event, so watch out for it in the May and June issues.

Another offroad builder we don't generally include in the budget category is Van Cruiser Caravans, so it was great to see a 17ft 6in (5.4m) Alpha RTV join our list well under our cutoff point. The van is a practical size for couples looking to get into tight spots and comes with a basic off-grid package in a tough, lovingly built van.

Lastly, X Series RV is a new import brand looking to make a mark on the offroad scene. Its range includes a 16ft family hybrid Warrior at $73,990 and a 17ft couples version at $75,990. Both boast composite body construction on a hot-dipped galvanised chassis.

It's no surprise that Jayco came out on top at the bottom of the price ladder because the popular brand is a perennial value proposition as it celebrates its 50th year of production. Even so, there was ample proof that the Australian industry is travelling strongly under continued and growing competition from imports.

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SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO

Jayco
DISCOVERY
Jayco
DISCOVERY
OUTBACK

AUSTRALIA'S NEXT BEST SELLER?

Words
TIM VAN DUYL

The range of Jayco Discovery caravans replaces the Journey, Jayco's most popular family vans ever, so it has big shoes to fill. Does it have what it takes to become the best-selling caravan of 2025 and on?

PICS TED AIREY VIDEO SIDESWIPE PRODUCTIONS AND JOSH HANGER

IN BRIEF

- New look for Jayco's most popular range
- Lounge slide-out offers extra space
- Semi-offroad van

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Slide-out gives you more space
- Reliable if basic Jayco fitout
- Standout colour

CONS

- Prices keep rising

> "It's a Jayco with the popular Outback upgrade option. *It has everything going for it*"

ABOVE AND BELOW The Jayco Discovery is shaping up to be Australia's most best-selling van; JTECH 2.0 independent trailing arm suspension

Our test van – the Jayco Discovery 21.66-4 Outback – ticks so many boxes I really do expect it to be one of if not the most popular vans in Australia for the coming few years. It is 21ft 6in (6.6m) long, the most popular size, features a north bed, centre dining and rear ensuite, one of the most popular layouts. Plus, it's a Jayco with the popular Outback upgrade option. It has everything going for it.

A FAMOUS NAME REBORN

The Discovery is not a new range to Jayco but one we have not seen in some years, and it replaces the Journey, which once replaced it.

The Journey and now Discovery are in the sweet spot of ranges available from Jayco. The Discovery sits above the Starcraft, which is very budget friendly and new-to-caravanning focused and below the more offroad, off-grid All-Terrain and luxury Silverline ranges.

The Journey was the best-selling range; the Discovery will no doubt follow on thanks to its blend of quality looks, feel and inclusions yet modest and affordable power and appliances used in its fit-out.

On The Move
CARAVANS

On The Move
OTM

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> *"The Outback pack adds a touch more exterior protection by way of* additional checkerplate and JTECH 2.0 suspension"

TO SLIDE-OUT OR NOT?

We had a slide-out variation of the Discovery 21.66-4, which for some is a no-go, but I think it should be a go-to. The slide-out is above the lounge, opposite the kitchen, so you can tuck it away on windy nights to avoid the sound of canvas flapping, and it adds oodles of space where it matters – where you entertain.

It does add a bit of cost, weight and complexity, however. The driveway price of the 21.66-4 you see here is $92,990, including the slide-out and Outback options, while its tare weight is 2450kg or about 90kg more than the most similar non-slide-out variant, the 22.68-3. The 22.68 will also save you $3000 on the 21.66 with its rear club lounge and centre ensuite layout. Remove the Outback option, and you can have this same layout for $86,990.

What would I do? I'd choose between the Outback 21.66-4 (with the slide-out) and 22.68-3 with the rear club lounge, both in Outback and here is why.

WHY JAYCO MAKES THE BEST FIRST VAN

Jayco will build in the region of 22,000-28,000 units in 2025. That's according to Jayco founder Gerry Ryan who hosted us for lunch a few months back and although a far call from the record-setting years of 2022 and 2023, it still represents the most caravans, campers and motorhomes from one brand in the country, and by some margin.

Jayco also nails the simple stuff. The floor is a polyethylene terephthalate or PET plastic for us dyslexics. The roof is one-piece fibreglass, the frame is aluminum and the power systems are basic but scalable as your needs arise and from a household brand (Projecta). When people ask me what makes a good van, especially novice caravanners, it's the above that matters.

LEFT AND RIGHT The new exterior 'Dune' colour is a standout; The slide-out creates a lot more internal living space

With a PET floor, there is no chance of dreaded rot. The alloy frame is light but tough and also will not rot while with the Projecta PM535, you can add another lithium battery and inverter if you cannot justify the cost on order (there is a good upgrade option dubbed the Power Pack that does exactly that, I would order it).

The Outback pack adds a touch more exterior protection by way of additional checkerplate and JTECH 2.0 suspension, which raises the body higher from the ground (without going extreme) courtesy of its independent trailing arm suspension.

The Outback option gives you a caravan capable of going that little bit further. Add on a grey water tank, and you're set for national park overnighters and weekends away.

Why all of that matters is resale and support. Buying from a brand with the reach of Jayco (more than 130 repair agents and retailers nationwide) is important, and couple that with buying one of the most popular models and it's a safe bet you will always have a good van to trade in when it's time to upgrade to that Silverline you have been eyeing.

MY25 JAYCO DISCOVERY
21.66-4 OUTBACK

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Overall length 8.43m (27ft 7in)
Body length 6.6m (21ft 6in)
Width 2.49m (8ft 2in)
Height 3.03m (9ft 11in)
Tare 2450kg
ATM 3050kg
Payload 600kg (calculated)
Ball weight at tare 178kg
Ball to tare ratio 7.3% (calculated)

EXTERNAL

Frame Aluminium
Cladding Aluminium composite sheet
Chassis Hot-dipped galvanised steel
Suspension JTECH 2.0 independent trailing arm
Coupling Cruisemaster DO35
Brakes Drum electric
Wheels 245/70/16 all-terrain tyres
Water 2 x 95L freshwater
Battery 1 x 100Ah lithium
Inverter N/A (2000W available in the Power Pack)
Solar 1 x 200W
Air-conditioner Dometic FreshJet
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control Lippart LCI

INTERNAL

Cooking Thetford Triplex Plus four-burner, grill and oven
Microwave Sphere
Fridge 224L Dometic compressor
Bathroom Full ensuite — separate shower and cassette toilet
Washing machine 3.3kg Aussie Traveller top-loader
Hot water Suburban Nautilus continuous gas

PRICE FROM $92,900

OPTIONS FITTED N/A

PRICE AS SHOWN $92,900

MORE INFORMATION

Jayco
1 Jayco Drive
Dandenong South Vic 3175
P: 03 8792 2000
E: info@jayco.com.au
W: jayco.com.au

Jayco
DISCOVERY

ABOVE Towing along the Great Ocean Road, Vic, with the Ranger Wildtrak 2.0L Bi-Turbo

> "We saw around 16L per 100km travelled *over 550km of spirited driving down Victoria's iconic Great Ocean Road*"

TOWING

With a tare of 2450kg and an ATM of 3050kg, you should look at a vehicle with a 3500kg max-braked tow capacity for a comfortable tow. You could limit your loading to under 3000kg and use an older Toyota Prado or ute, but you would likely be at the limit of both the tow vehicle's GCM capacity and capability. A good fit would be what we used, a Ford Ranger with its 3500kg tow capacity and 6350kg GCM. Towing the Discovery 21.66-4 at full weight, the Ranger would still have almost a tonne for fuel, a load and accessories – a perfect result.

Our Ranger was the Wildtrak 2.0L Bi-Turbo, one of the best-selling models in the best-selling vehicle in Australia. Some will wonder if the small capacity engine has the guts to haul 3000kg; it does. You can read more about it in Tony O'Kane's excellent review in issue 657 and online (simply search 'Caravan World Wildtrak' and you'll see it in your search results).

The Wildtrak carries a sizable RRP due to a couple of options and the steady rise in prices. At $73,140, plus on road costs as seen in Tony's review, it is a big chunk of change, and you could suffice with less but with the Wildtrak you get what I think is the best interior in a ute plus features like a lockable tonneau cover, which I really rate.

In terms of fuel consumption, the 2L Bi-Turbo is hard to beat. We saw around 16L per 100km travelled over 550km of spirited driving down Victoria's iconic Great Ocean Road. More sensible towing would no doubt get that down a litre or two which would have it best in class.

My experience suggests you would get about the same or a litre more per 100km from an Isuzu D-MAX or MU-X and the same again more from a new LandCruiser or V6 Ranger.

For feel on the road, the Discovery 21.66-4 is boring, which is great. It is not too high off the ground as to have it lurch in turns and it showed no vices at speed; it's also good to see that a sway controller comes standard.

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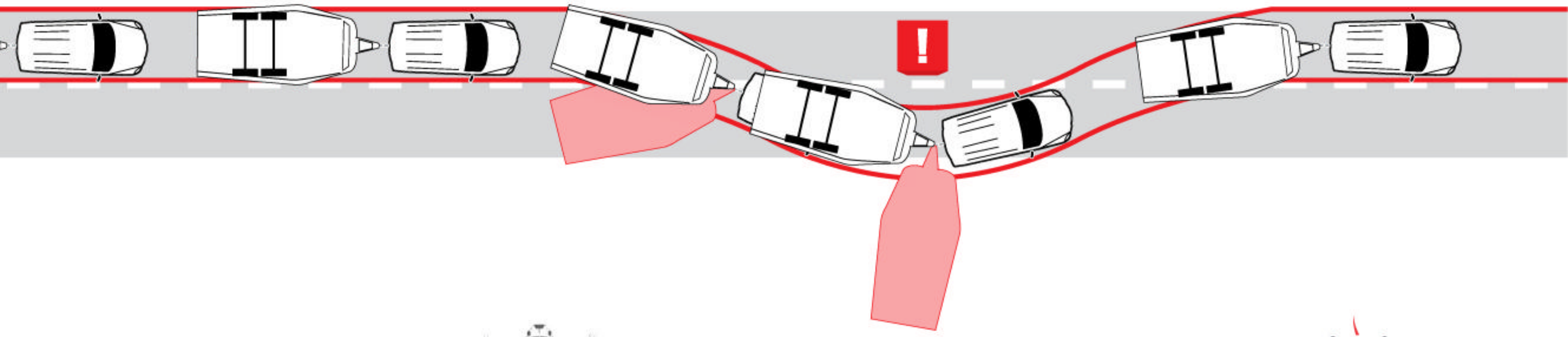
World first advanced technology to include ABS braking and a range of other safety benefits as well as user-friendly features, AL-KO Tow Assist provides confidence when towing, allowing you to focus on the journey ahead.



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TOW ASSIST

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ELECTRIC ABS BRAKES

SWAY MITIGATION

EVASIVE ACTION CONTROL

SCAN HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT HOW TOW ASSIST PROTECTS YOUR ADVENTURES

CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT The interior has a very Euro feel about it; The large 224L compressor fridge is a favourite; The slide-out allows for a spacious club lounge

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
Jayco's ability to keep prices competitive with less well supported imports is impressive

TOWABILITY
I'd suggest a vehicle capable of 3500kg towing for the 3050kg ATM Discovery 21.66-4

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
As a 'holiday park to holiday park' long-distance cruiser, it fits the bill well

BUILD QUALITY
Reliable and simple are what best describe Jayco's build

LIVEABILITY
The extra space at the slide-out adds a lot of liveability, as does the massive bench

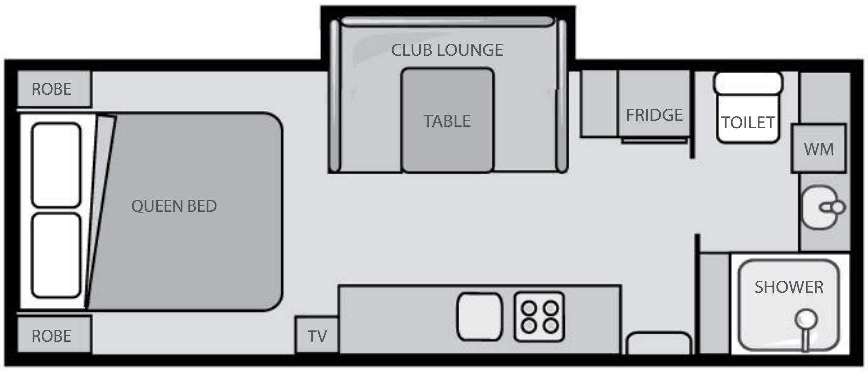
SELF-SUFFICIENCY
It's not designed for weeks off-grid, but it will give you a few with the inclusions shown here and more if optioned up

CUSTOMER CARE
A two-year warranty on the body and five years on the structure of the van is decent, though water crossings and damage from corrugations are excluded even on the Outback models

INNOVATION
Steady as she goes with new design and better appliances

X-FACTOR
The new colour stands out as does the bigger bench and slide-out positioning

> "Inside is where the Discovery 21.66-4 *really stands out for looks*"



UPDATED LOOKS

Some people do not like the new Dune exterior colour of the new Discovery range, and I am not sure why. It looks fantastic in person and is different from the masses of grey and off-white we commonly see. I have yet to see one that is not Dune, but you can order a Discovery that way; Jayco will charge you for the privilege, however – $1500, I believe, for a less-interesting off-white.

Inside is where the Discovery 21.66-4 really stands out for looks. There are a number of options for the upholstery, with ours covered in Lola Grey. The cabinetry was the star in Reed Green, which offset nicely against the Stone Grey benchtops and a pale mint green subway tile in the ensuite and on the splashback. The look has a Euro feel about it yet there is substance behind the smooth surfaces with the seat framing all aluminium and decent latches throughout.

Complete with a classy black sink and tap, the 21.66-4 has the largest single benchtop in a Jayco to date, which, for those of us who love a coffee and air fryer, makes a real difference. I should flag that the microwave is mounted above the bench, which is not ideal for lifting hot meals from. In terms of appliances, the Discovery 21.66-4 is well adorned.

APPLIANCES

The microwave is a Sphere unit which I'd like to see mounted under bench height to reduce burn risks from hot food spills. The oven is a combi-unit from Thetford, a Triplex Plus with four gas hobs, grill and oven. Hot water comes from a Suburban Nautilus continuous gas system (the stove and HWS are fed by two 9kg gas bottles). For comfort and ease of use, the awning is electric while a Slumberest Cloud 9 pillowtop mattress should see you sleep well at night.

There is a top load washing machine with 3.3kg capacity tucked under the rear bench beside the cassette toilet and, most importantly, there is a massive fridge/freezer featuring a compressor able to run on either 12 or 240V; a Thetford 224L (my favourite large upright fridge).

ABOVE AND BELOW The new Jayco Discovery with the Outback package is great value for money; The full ensuite is as elegant as the rest of the interior

> *"The Discovery will likely be the most popular series of vans in Australia*, so it is unlikely you will go wrong with one"

SELF-SUFFICIENCY

This is still a Jayco and only a mid-tier model, so it is not designed or fitted out as an off-grid powerhouse. It has a modest 200W solar panel on the roof (a second is optional) and a single 100Ah lithium battery that will keep the aforementioned fridge running and lights on a day or two in inclement weather and longer if you park in the sun (my experience with the same setup in another trailer has been indefinite in good summer weather).

Under the chassis are two 95L freshwater tanks and provision for a grey tank (I would always opt for the grey tank to gain access to NSW and WA national parks). This volume of water should last you a week or two, depending on how much use you make of the shower.

I mentioned the optional Power Pack earlier which will take the Discovery 21.66-4 to a level where you could run a small air fryer, coffee machine or charge laptops and so on without issue. It comes with a 2000W inverter, twin 120Ah batteries and a second 200W solar panel. The Power Pack might fire up the roof-mounted air-conditioner, but it will not run it for long, so it is best to consider using the air-conditioner only when connected to mains power.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Only a year ago, a similar layout Jayco Journey Outback of the same size was $3000 cheaper than what you see here. It did not come with the same lithium battery or fridge and was dated internally. Is the price jump worth it? I think so, the 2025 Discovery is a better looking, more modern feeling van with a touch more value in the larger fridge and battery. I'm honestly surprised the price didn't go up more with the constant pressure of suppliers and wage price rises.

In terms of competition, there is pressure from the imported Snowy River Caravans SRC-22S that has the same layout (and slide-out) which when optioned with a similar sized fridge (the only real appliance difference) comes in at around $81,000. The price difference might seem great, but it is a dedicated on-road van that rides on torsion suspension, which from experience is far less capable or compliant than the JTECH 2.0. Snowy does not offer an SRT (all-terrain) van with the same layout and independent suspension. From local builders, Crusader Caravans does not appear to offer a slide-out with the same layout and nor do New Age Caravans, making an apples-to-apples comparison hard.

THE WRAP

You will have to be the judge on the value, but I would suggest, like I always do, if you are new to vans, buy Jayco and buy a popular model, as they are well supported with the largest network of agents and their resale value is predictable and solid. The Discovery will likely be the most popular series of vans in Australia, so it is unlikely you will go wrong with one.

HOW TO SAVE WEIGHT ON YOUR CARAVAN

Every caravanner understands that following weight regulations and limits can be one of the most challenging parts of hitting the open road. So why not replace your old, heavy batteries with iTechworld's lithium range? This could be one of the simplest ways to reduce the weight of your caravan's setup, as lithium batteries can weigh up to two-thirds less than traditional AGM and lead-acid counterparts!

Designed and developed in Australia for Australian conditions, our X Range lithium batteries are the epitome of versatility. They are genuine drop-in replacements, allowing seamless integration into your existing setup without replacing anything in your system. Not only is switching out your old batteries the easiest way to drop the kilos, but it couldn't be any simpler to do—it's as easy as taking out the old and putting in the new. An impressive IP67 waterproof rating certifies that these batteries are perfect for various demanding outdoor environments, including external mounting on caravans, under-bonnet in 4WDs, boats and more; you won't have to worry about these getting wet!

The X Range has been engineered to be installed in various locations and housings. No matter your size or space needs, you'll be able to find a battery that works for you, from the trim 100SX to the beefy 400X PRO. When you're working in a cramped area like a caravan, having plenty of options when installing your battery is a weight off your shoulders!

Traditional batteries allow for approximately 50% battery capacity usage—not so with the X Range! Our lithium deep-cycle batteries allow you to use 100% of their capacity, double the actual usable capacity of standard AGM or lead-acid offerings. The weight-saving design reduces your caravan's overall load, and the ability to cycle over 10,000* times ensures a significantly longer lifespan than traditional batteries, which would see around 300 cycles.

Are you working in a tight spot? We've got you covered. The X Range includes various battery shapes and sizes, like our slimline iTECH100SX. At just 110mm wide and weighing a ridiculously light 11.3kg, it's perfect for space-conscious campers needing a battery that will perform consistently.

The X Range also now includes integrated Bluetooth compatibility, allowing you to monitor and control your batteries directly from your smartphone using the iTechworld Connect Battery Management app. The app provides real-time data on battery health, capacity, voltage, current, and temperature and supports multiple batteries within a 10M range.

Joining the X Range is the updated iTECH240X PRO with Bluetooth compatibility, a powerful yet compact lithium battery that brings cutting-edge connectivity and control to caravanners and off-grid adventurers. Like its X Range companions, the iTECH240X PRO with Bluetooth is a genuine drop-in replacement that dramatically reduces weight while delivering unparalleled performance. Seamless Bluetooth integration allows real-time monitoring and management of power levels through the iTechworld Connect Battery Management App. With a robust 240Ah usable capacity, the iTECH240X PRO with Bluetooth perfectly balances efficiency and power for those who demand reliability without the bulk of traditional battery systems. Whether you're on the road or setting up camp, checking your battery's health and status at a glance means more confidence in your power setup and fewer surprises when off-grid.

At iTechworld, safety and standard compliance are paramount. As such, we verify that the X Range meets Australian and international standards, including IEC:62619. As a testament to the durability of our batteries (and our confidence!), we offer a 5-year Australian warranty, meaning you can trust the longevity of your X Range battery.

With superior performance, seamless integration, unmatched reliability, and effortless management, the iTechworld X Range is a camper's best friend. Call the Power Experts today and hit the road with confidence!

* 5000 times at 100%. 10000 at 50%.

KEY FEATURES OF X RANGE

- Bluetooth compatible
- 5 year Australian warranty
- Lighter than equivalent AGM batteries
- IP67 waterproof - can be mounted externally
- Designed and developed in Australia

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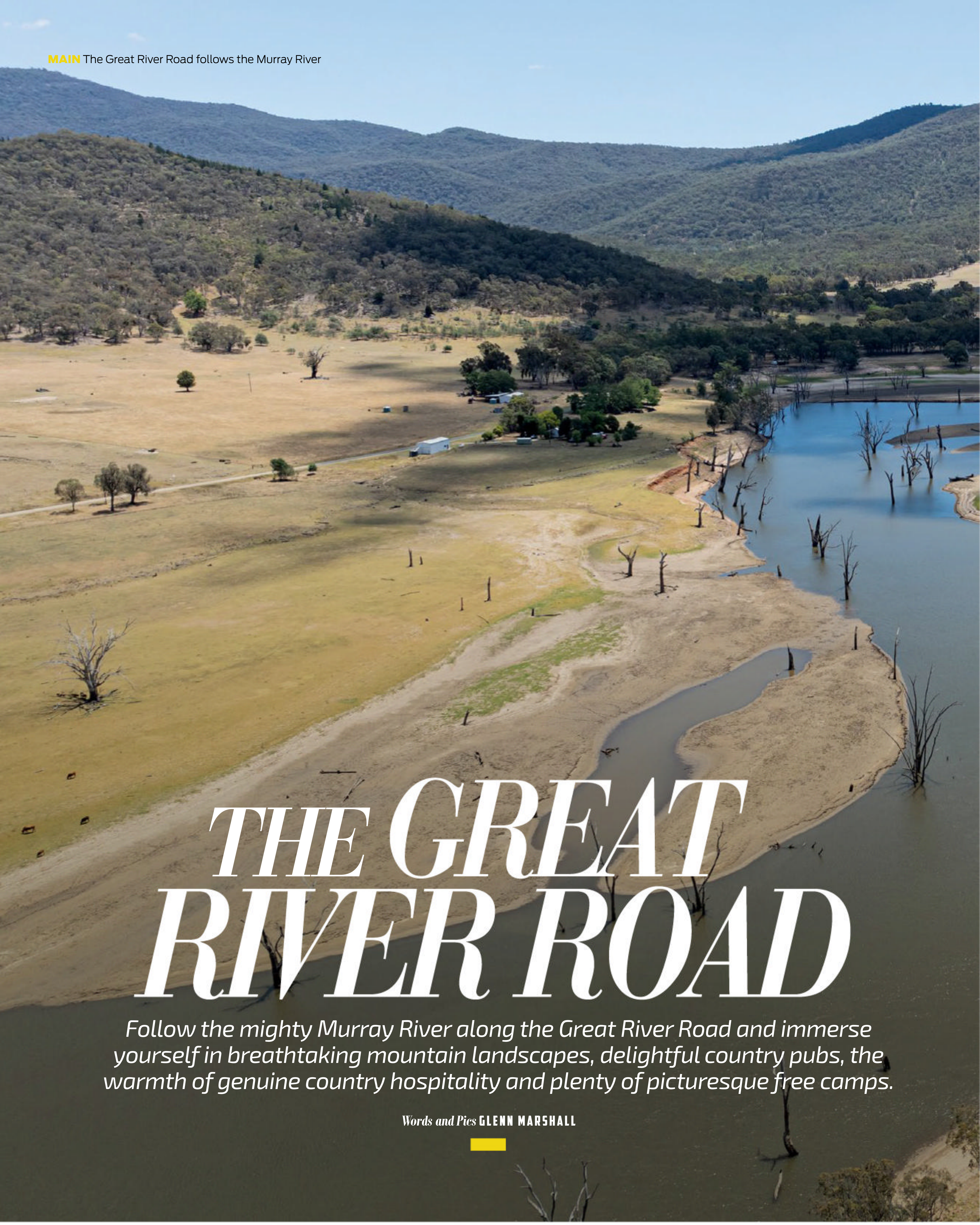


MAIN The Great River Road follows the Murray River

THE GREAT RIVER ROAD

Follow the mighty Murray River along the Great River Road and immerse yourself in breathtaking mountain landscapes, delightful country pubs, the warmth of genuine country hospitality and plenty of picturesque free camps.

Words and Pics **GLENN MARSHALL**

BRIDGE LOAD LIMIT 30t GROSS
LOW CLEARANCE 4.2m

ABOVE AND BELOW 'Bridge to the Moon' is one of the many sculptures along the route; Bethanga Bridge is heritage listed

If you're planning a journey from Albury-Wodonga on the Victoria-New South Wales border to Corryong and want to add some adventure, the charming Great River Road is the way to go, as it offers a unique experience waiting to be discovered. This scenic byway winds along the stunning Murray River, showcasing breathtaking landscapes and inviting spots to stop and explore. Before you set out on this touring route, take a moment to appreciate what Albury-Wodonga has to offer.

Following the Riverina Highway out of Albury, you'll arrive at the Lake Hume dam wall. Take some time to stroll across the top of the wall and soak in the lake views. Construction of the dam began in 1919 and was completed in 1936 to manage the flow of the Murray River for navigation and irrigation. It also created an excellent space for water activities such as water skiing, fishing and birdwatching.

The Bethanga Bridge is a heritage-listed steel truss road bridge that was opened in 1930, spanning a section of Hume Dam and serving as the border crossing from Albury to Bethanga in Victoria. This is where the Great River Road begins.

Just a short distance from the bridge is a scenic lookout offering further views of Lake Hume. A little further along is another lookout featuring a sculpture called 'Bridge to the Moon'. Hidden beneath the waters below are the remnants of the Talgarno Bridge. This 64m timber truss structure was opened on 26 April 1895. When the Hume Dam was completed, the bridge's approaches were submerged for the first time. In 2007, due to severe drought and dam levels at one per cent capacity, the bridge's foundations became visible for the first time in 75 years.

The Great River Road follows the water closely, and when water levels are low, the cattle graze freely on the grassed floodplain. The hollowed trunks of dead gum trees that used to be submerged stand like sentinels, now home to various birds.

> *“This scenic byway winds along the stunning Murray River, showcasing breathtaking landscapes and inviting spots to stop and explore”*

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Views from Mount Granya; Burrowye Bend Reserve is a great campsite; Gadds Bend Reserve caters to caravans of all sizes

NATURE WALKS

As you pass the old Granya Hotel, now transformed into a B&B, take the turnoff to the picturesque little town of Granya. This charming town is the gateway to Mount Granya State Park. Nestled within the park is the Cotton Tree Creek Campground, the only designated campsite. It boasts plenty of flat ground, perfect for caravans. Here, you can unwind by the firepits and enjoy the tranquillity of nature.

From this serene spot, set off on a scenic 1.4km walk along the trail to the seasonally flowing Granya Falls. Along the way, don’t forget to visit the Granya Scout Hut, a log hut constructed in 1937 by the Granya Scout Group.

You can take a scenic 10.4km walk from the campground to the stunning summit of Mount Granya or drive via Granya Road, turning onto Mt Granya Road, however towing is not recommended for this 8km stretch. There’s a spacious flat area at the start of the dirt road to unhitch your caravan or park at Cotton Tree Creek.

The summit access road is suitable for 2WD vehicles, but it is rough in some sections. At the top, you’ll discover a fire spotting tower and a picnic area with a table, firepit, drop toilet and non-potable water. A 50m walk from the parking area takes you to Georges Creek lookout, which offers stunning views of the mountains and the valley below.

The Lyrebird Loop Nature Trail is a 400m return loop trail frequented by the superb lyrebird, whose scratchings are often visible on the forest floor. You might also hear their loud, melodic calls. They possess the remarkable ability to mimic an extensive range of sounds. The male lyrebird displays an elegant array of tail feathers, which he uses to woo female companions.

One of the most captivating advantages of driving this scenic route is the abundance of picturesque riverside camping areas that beckon adventurers along the way. Imagine waking up to the gentle sounds of flowing water and the rustle of leaves, all without the distractions of modern facilities.

Two of the best spots for free camping along the stretch towards Jingellic are Burrowye Bend Reserve and Gadds Bend Reserve. The first features a spacious riverside area, while the second has limited space. Access to both is straightforward, and the superb backdrops make them popular with caravanners and big rigs.

A shiny metal sculpture of a wedge-tailed eagle stands proudly at Mount Alfred Gap Lookout. This region is favoured by Australia’s largest raptors, which can soar up to 2000 metres high, thanks to thermals that provide extra lift.

> *"Just out the back of Bridge Hotel lies Jingellic Reserve, a popular free camping area"*

ABOVE AND BELOW It can be a challenge to get a spot at the free camp behind the Bridge Hotel; Bogong moths were a delicacy

QUAINT COUNTRY TOWNS

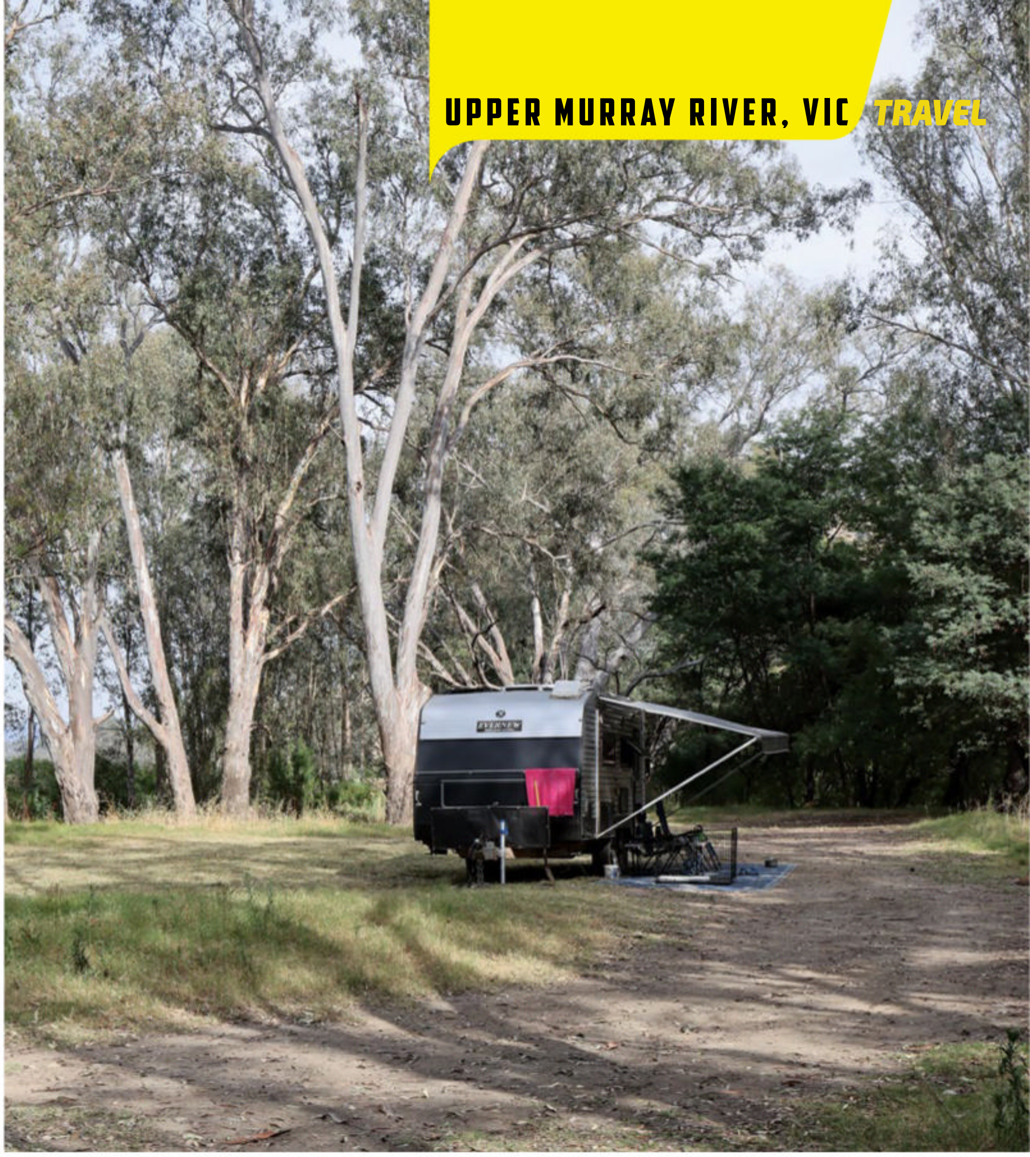
One of the region's most iconic country pubs is the Bridge Hotel at Jingellic. In addition to serving icy cold drinks and great bar meals, just out the back lies Jingellic Reserve, a popular free camping area. The pub provides flushing toilets and hot showers for $4, while cold showers are complimentary.

The quaint hamlet of Walwa features supplies at the general store, and the Walwa Hotel serves excellent meals while providing plenty of country hospitality. There is a dump point located at the recreation reserve on O'Halloran Street. The Walwa General Store also operates as a cosy cafe offering toasties, hamburgers and barista coffee for those in need.

Walwa Riverside Caravan Park is impressive, with sites shaded by cottonwoods and views of the Murray River. The amenities are clean, and the camp kitchen is well-equipped. Just a short stroll from the park is a small beach where you can enjoy a swim. A canoe is ideal for this spot, and the boat ramp allows keen fishermen to launch their tinnies in hopes of catching a Murray cod.

The Bogong Moth

RIGHT The campsites at Neil's Bend Reserve are secluded



FREE CAMPS

Neil's Bend Murray River Reserve, overlooked by Pine Mountain, offers plenty of free camping opportunities. There are many tracks, most ending at an epic campsite beside the river. The largest is right at the end and has the best river access.

A bit further along is a roadside stop known as Yabbarin, the 'place of great talk'. There, a sculpture of a lace monitor by local First Nations artist Glennys Briggs stands. A few storyboards explain the significance of Pine Mountain to the local Indigenous people and how the fires from 2019 to 2024 devastated the area.

The Jim Newman Wayside Stop rest area at Tintaldra has a bogong moth sculpture with an interpretive panel highlighting the moths' significance to Indigenous groups as they collected, roasted and ate the fatty, protein-rich delicacy.

An alternative free camp is at Clarke Lagoon Wildlife Reserve. This one is limited to seven days, and you must be self-contained. Pets aren't allowed at this camp. The ranger visits this spot regularly, so don't forget to ask if they have any suggestions for things to do or see.

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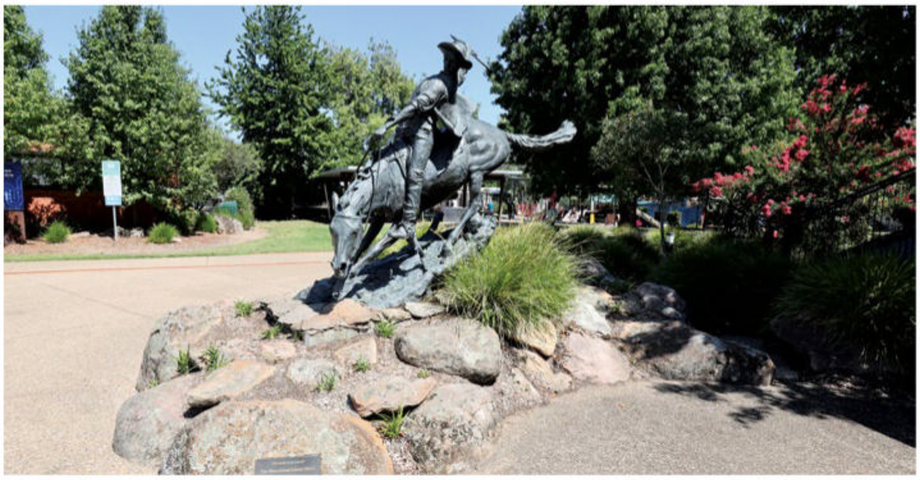
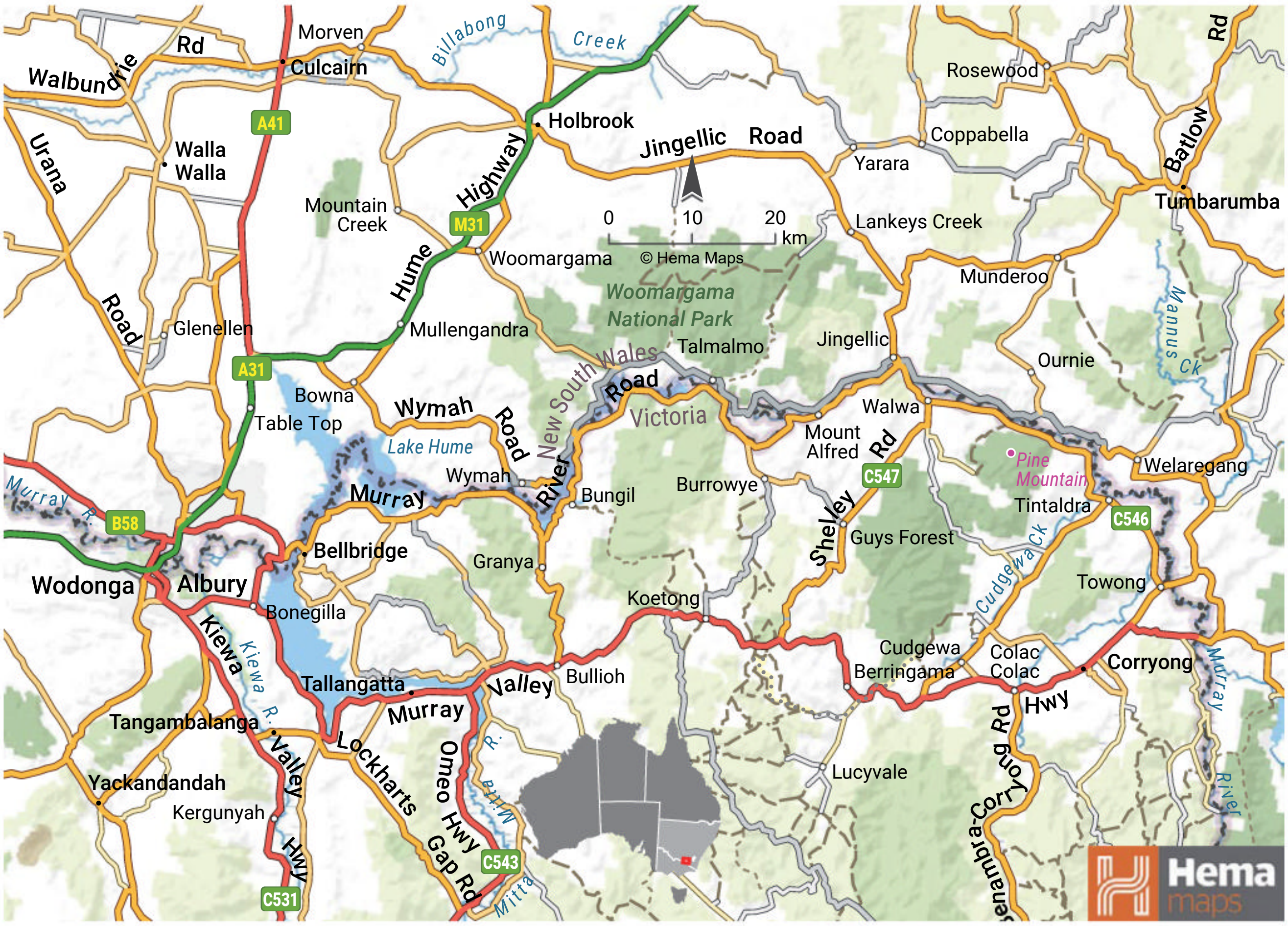
The historic town of Tintaldra served as an essential crossing point of the Murray River, which led to the construction of a customs house. The Tintaldra Hotel is open Wednesday through Sunday; check the board for opening and closing times. The old truss bridge spanning the Murray River is impressive; see if you can spot the sculpture of a Murray cod.

Mount Mittamatite is a must-see destination. To get there, take Ranch Road off Murray River Road. The 16km dirt road is only suitable for dry weather and unsuitable for towing, so plan accordingly. Emberys Lookout has a car park 500m from Ranch Road and is just 100m from the lookout.

The sights of Mount Kosciuszko and the Snowy Mountains are truly spectacular. The Southern Lookout is closer to the fire tower. It is a 750m drive followed by a 150m walk, and it offers panoramic views over Corryong and across Mount Pinnibar and Mount Bogong.



ABOVE AND BELOW Emberys Lookout offers expansive views across to the Snowy Mountains; Sculptures in Corryong showcase the importance of the region's bush heritage


Morven
Culcairn
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Walbundrie
Billabong
Creek
Holbrook
Jingellic Road
Rosewood
Coppabella
Yarara
Batlow
Rd
Tumbarumba
Urana
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Mountain Creek
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Lankeys Creek
Woomargama
Munderoo
Woomargama National Park
Mannus Ck
Road
Glenellen
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Ournie
A31
New South Wales
Bowna
Table Top
Wymah Road
Road
Walwa
Victoria
Mount Alfred
Rd
Lake Hume
C547
Pine Mountain
Welaregang
Murray R.
Wymah
Murray
River
Bungil
Burrowye
Shelley
Tintaldra
B58
C546
Guys Forest
Bellbridge
Wodonga
Albury
Granya
Cudgewa Ck
Towong
Bonegilla
Koetong
Kiewa
Kiewa R.
Cudgewa
Colac Colac
Berringama
Corryong
Murray River
Tallangatta
Valley
Bullioh
Hwy
Murray
Tangambalanga
Valley
Omeo Hwy
R.
Yackandandah
Lockharts Gap Rd
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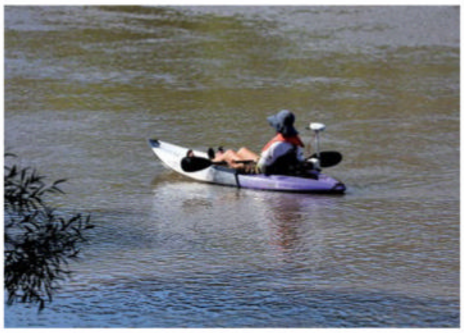

"Mount Mittamatite is a must-see destination"

Lighthouse Crossing Reserve is one of the best free caravan-friendly camping spots near Tintaldra. It is a reasonable distance from the road and accessible via a farmer's paddock. While this highly rated reserve isn't advisable in wet conditions, it has low-maintained grass and some shade.

The Great River Road concludes at Towong. Turn left, cross the bridge, and uncover the lovely Towong Reserve Camping Area. With its shaded, grassy terrain, this campsite caters to even the largest trailers. It's conveniently located near the road yet far enough away to offer a sense of safety.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Lighthouse Crossing Reserve is a cracking free camp site; Cudgewa Bluff Falls; Canoeing is popular on the Upper Murray; Tilntaldra Hotel

TRAVEL PLANNER

The Great River Road is less than 150km long from the Bethanga Bridge to Towong, it deserves at least three days to explore all the detours and truly savour the adventure.

Plan your trip for any time of the year. Summer is great for swimming, autumn is the most colourful time, winter is cold, but you'll see snow-capped peaks, and spring is when the flowers bloom.

More information can be found online: visittheundiscovered.com.au/um-home/um-see-and-do/um-great-river-road

COLAC COLAC caravan park
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FISHIN
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SPEED LIMIT WITHIN PARK

> *"The Great River Road offers an exceptional journey where you can stay as long as you wish"*

LEFT AND ABOVE Wymah Ferry is a unique way to cross the Murray River; The Colac Colac Caravan Park is one of the best in the region

SNOWY RIVER COUNTRY

Towong is home to a historic racecourse that has been hosting race meetings since 1871, with a track distance of 2100m. The grandstand featured in scenes from the movie *Phar Lap* and was where the gangster Squizzy Taylor pinched the day's takings in 1927. The Towong Cup, held on the Victorian Labour Day long weekend, is one of the bush racing calendar's most popular picnic race events.

Corryong is a beautiful country town with plenty to see and do. It's the perfect spot to end your journey along the Great River Road. The friendly staff at the Corryong Visitor Information Centre will provide plenty of tips and tricks to help you maximise your stay. Additionally, several fantastic sculptures outside the centre showcase the importance of bush heritage in the region.

The Man from Snowy River Bush Festival occurs annually in April (10-13 April 2025). It celebrates Victorian High Country bush heritage traditions and features bush poetry, markets, a rodeo, a muster and the Working Dog Championships.

The Man from Snowy River Museum is located on Hanson Street. It boasts an impressive collection of memorabilia and relocated buildings, including the old lock-up, police station, blacksmith and farming equipment. Visitors can explore the museum for as long as they like for a gold coin donation.

Cudgewa Bluff Falls is situated in Burrowa - Pine Mountain National Park and puts on a spectacular display after good rains. The water cascades over Cudgewa Bluff and into a beautiful grotto below. The 500m return walk is moderate, featuring some stairs leading to the viewing platform at the bottom.

Colac Colac Caravan Park is located on the banks of Nariel Creek, just 6km from Corryong along the Murray Valley Highway. A visit in autumn is essential when the leaves turn golden, red and purple; it's simply stunning. Set on six hectares, this expansive park features 126 powered sites and 97 unpowered sites. All sites are grassed, and you'll enjoy plenty of shade during summer. Although there isn't a pool, who needs one when there's a clear water creek on-site?

The Great River Road offers an exceptional journey where you can stay as long as you wish. It showcases numerous beautiful free camps, well-kept caravan parks, delightful towns, and abundant country hospitality at every turn.

FAST FACTS

Caravan parks
Albury All Seasons Tourist Park
W: gdayparks.com.au
Wodonga Caravan & Cabin Park
W: wccp.com.au
Walwa Riverside Caravan Park
W: walwariversidecaravanpark.com.au
Colac Colac Caravan Park
W: colaccolaccaravanpark.com.au

Dump points
- Albury
- Corryong
- Walwa

Information centres
Corryong Visitor Information Centre
W: towong.vic.gov.au/4-visitors/visitor-information-centre
Albury Visitor Information Centre
W: visitalburywodonga.com

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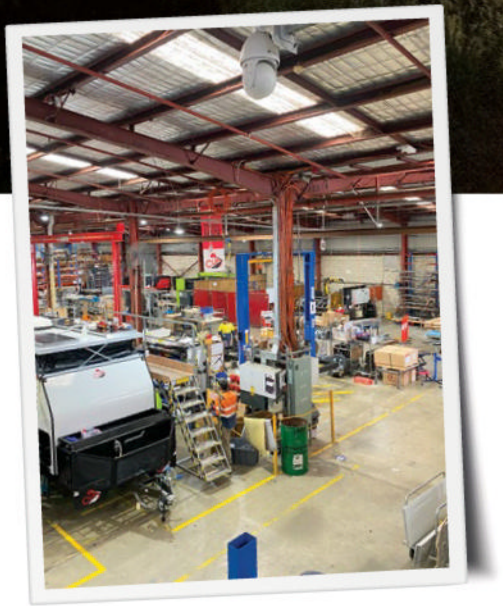
CUB CAMPERS:
CRAFTED FOR QUALITY

The caravanning industry is an ever-changing community of innovation and technology. However, some core values stand strong amid the changes in the modern camping scene. Cub Campers is an Aussie manufacturer that has held its values closely, building caravans and camper trailers of the highest quality. Every product is designed and manufactured in Australia, using 100 per cent Australian BlueScope steel, and is built to stand the test of time.

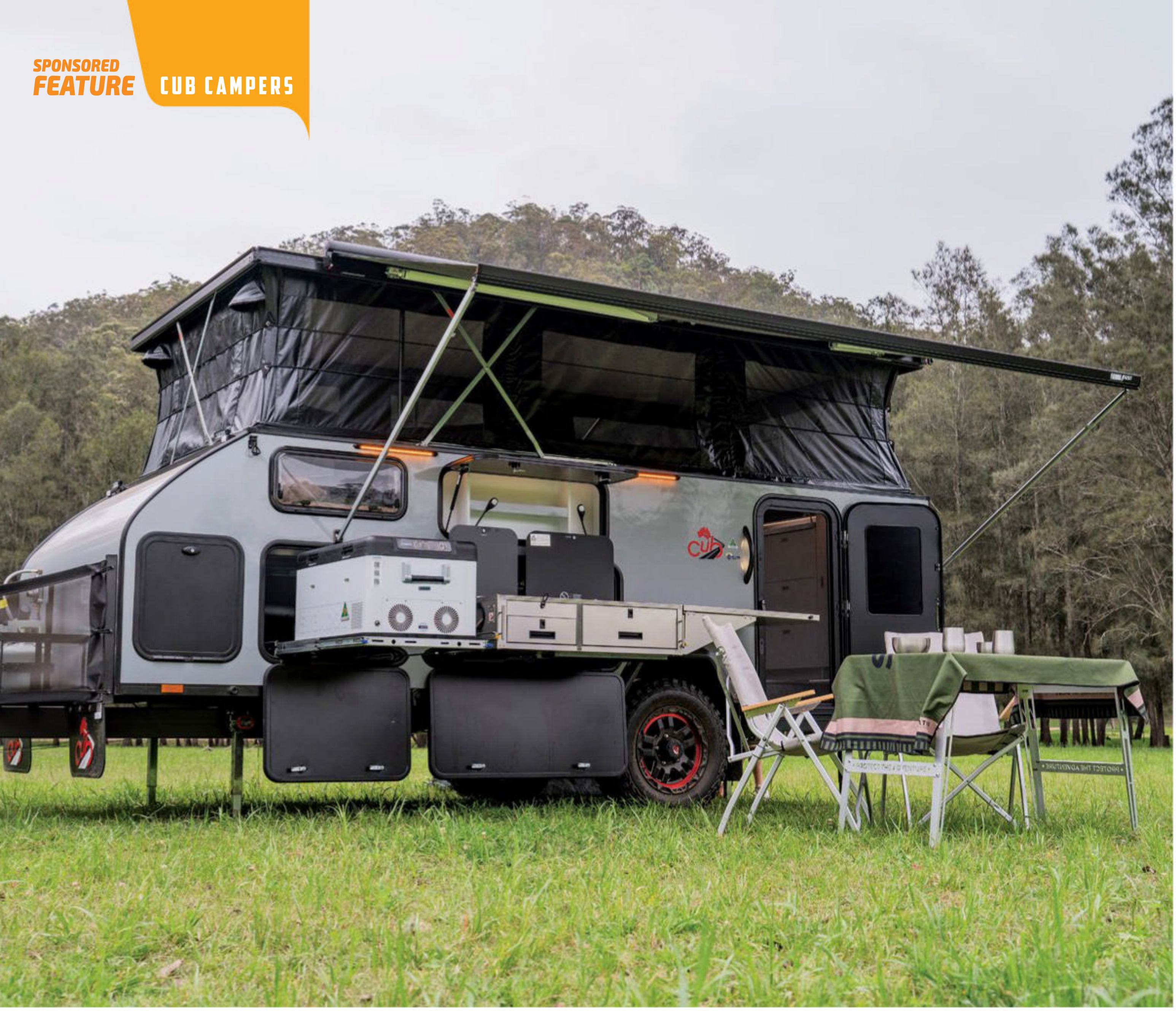
Words *Editorial Team* *Pics* *Supplied*

Established in 1968, Cub Campers is a family-owned and operated business devoted to crafting caravans and camper trailers to the highest standards. 'Australian-made' is at the forefront of everything Cub does, from the materials it uses to the location of its factory. Cub's headquarters, located in the heart of Sydney, spans 12,000 square metres and houses everything from manufacturing, sales, supporting offices and service centre in one central location. This setup ensures seamless coordination among the entire Cub team, allowing for a controlled and perfected manufacturing process for all parties involved in each camper.

Originally established by founder John Kelso Fagan, Cub has stayed true to its strong family values, growing its range of campers from simple box trailers with a canvas roof to its renewed expansive caravan and camper trailer ranges. These ranges are now led by managing director and grandson of the founder, Shane Fagan. Shane's dedication to upholding his family's legacy and his commitment to Australian-made caravans is a standout in Australia's RV market, exemplifying a true-blue Aussie family business.



ABOVE AND BELOW The Cub H14; Cub Campers' Sydney factory



ABOVE AND BELOW The new Cub F14 hybrid was released in early 2025; This compact hybrid offers a luxurious interior that is surprisingly spacious thanks to the pop-top design

> "Cub Campers also expanded its lineup earlier this year, *with the new F14 hybrid caravan making waves in the caravanning community*"

WHAT'S NEW AT CUB

Exciting changes have occurred at Cub, including the release of new camper styles, additions to the management team, innovative manufacturing technology and a reaffirmation of its commitment to Australian-sourced quality.

One notable change is the appointment of Scott Dillon as business development director. Scott brings a wealth of knowledge in sales and manufacturing from his previous experience in marine sales. He is passionate about Cub's Aussie-owned and operated ideology, stating, "I really like the Cub Campers story – the fact that it hasn't chopped and changed over the years and – like me – is highly passionate about the Australian-made ethos." Scott further commented, "It's a new chapter in the life of a family business, and I'm honoured to be the first non-Fagan part of it."

Cub Campers also expanded its lineup earlier this year, with the new F14 hybrid caravan making waves in the caravanning community. Its sleek 14ft compact design makes it an ideal hybrid caravan option, providing an easy towing and storage experience while offering a luxurious and spacious interior using pop-top technology. We were fortunate enough to check out the F14 at our Caravan of the Year 2025 presented by MSA 4X4 Accessories competition last month, so keep an eye out for its in-depth review in an upcoming issue of *Caravan World*.

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ABOVE AND BELOW Plenty of natural light in the H14 hybrid caravan; The new F14 is Cub's smallest hybrid yet

The F14 joins other hybrid caravan models like the H14, H16 (dual overall winner at *Caravan World*'s Australia's Best Hybrids 2024 presented by Tough Dog 4WD Suspension), L16 and C16, providing Cub customers with options for every budget. Cub also offers its traditional camper trailer range and has made major changes to make them more affordable than ever. The Weekender, Explorer, Escape, Frontier and Drifter make up the 2025 camper trailer range, proving that these designs can stand the test of time, with the addition of innovative technology to enhance camping experiences.

New technology is another key focus of Cub, as the team is always searching for ways to be more efficient and produce Aussie-made products of the highest quality. This has led

PROUDLY AUSTRALIAN MADE SINCE 1968
Cub

to the addition of impressive manufacturing technology such as the Amada laser cutter, which produces cleaner finishes and finer cuts during production. Cub is also working to acquire a powder coating system to produce premium quality camper vans. Notable changes to the production line have also occurred, with restructuring of the manufacturing assembly line to ensure higher quality at a more efficient rate.

Cub Campers is fiercely dedicated to research and development, collaborating with external and in-house experts to design and develop vans that prioritise quality, durability and comfort. On average, the Cub team releases one to two new styles per year. This expansive mindset and continual push for innovation sets Cub Campers apart, demonstrating its commitment to providing customers with 100 per cent Aussie-made, sourced and built campers, while also ensuring the highest level of customisation to suit the needs of the owner.

ABOVE AND BELOW Cub Campers is proudly Australian owned and operated; The team is dedicated to building premium quality hybrid caravans designed to handle Australia's tough conditions

> *"Behind the success of Cub Campers is a dedicated and talented team* that works tirelessly to uphold the company's high standards"

ABOVE AND BELOW Compact and lightweight, the H14 is a great option for those who like to head off the beaten track with the comforts of home; A new Cub Camper is on the horizon, so keep an eye on this space!

GO THE DISTANCE WITH CUB

Cub Campers has established a strong dealer and retail network across Australia, ensuring that its products are accessible to customers nationwide. This network allows Cub to provide excellent customer service and support, maintaining strong relationships with its dealers to ensure that every customer receives the best possible experience. Whether you're purchasing a new camper or hybrid caravan or seeking service and maintenance, Cub's dealer network is there to assist you every step of the way.

Cub Campers continues to innovate while staying true to its roots. Behind the success of Cub Campers is a dedicated and talented team that works tirelessly to uphold the company's high standards. Their commitment to excellence and passion for innovation are key drivers in maintaining Cub's reputation as a leader in the Australian camping and caravan industry.

With the upcoming NSW Rosehill Caravan Camping Holiday Supershow (29 April - 4 May 2025), Cub Campers is rumoured to have an exciting addition to the Cub range, so be sure to keep an eye on this space.

To find out more, head to the Cub Campers website: cubcampers.com.au

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THE EVOLUTION OF OFF-GRID CAMPING

ABOVE AND BELOW Bigger power systems are becoming more common; Enerdrive | Dometic power display

For many Aussie caravanners, the ability to head to your favourite remote campsite for days of off-grid camping is what caravanning is all about. But, to do this, a dependable power supply is essential. That's where the great range of power solutions by Enerdrive | Dometic comes in handy. ***Words*** *Amelia Mansell* ***Pics*** *Supplied*

Gone are the days when off-grid camping meant roughing it with minimal comforts. Today, thanks to advancements in mobile power solutions, adventurers can enjoy the great outdoors with all the conveniences of home. Full-size fridges, washing machines, coffee makers and air-conditioners are now part of the off-grid experience, making those remote campsites more accessible and enjoyable.

Enerdrive | Dometic, based in Brisbane, Queensland, has been a pioneer in Australia's RV and outdoor industry for more than two decades. Its innovative products ensure that adventurers stay powered up, no matter how far they venture off the beaten path. Known for their reliability and ease of use, Enerdrive | Dometic's high-quality plug-and-play systems are designed and built in Australia to withstand tough conditions.

Specialising in battery solutions, chargers, inverters and solar systems, Enerdrive | Dometic offers products backed by an impressive five-year warranty and lifetime technical support, providing users with the confidence and support they need to keep their off-grid adventures running smoothly.

BUILDING A RELIABLE OFF-GRID POWER SETUP

Creating a dependable off-grid power system involves more than just having a large battery; it's about ensuring all components work together seamlessly. Enerdrive | Dometic offers a diverse range of products to meet various budgets and power needs.

SWITCH OFF. STAY POWERED.
VOYAGER DIGITAL

ABOVE AND RIGHT It's important to understand your power usage; Enerdrive | Dometic Voyager inverter/charger

> "Creating a dependable off-grid power system involves more than just having a large battery; *it's about ensuring all components work together seamlessly."*

"One of our standout innovations is the integration of multiple devices into a single unit," says Paul Wilkie, head of marketing at Dometic ANZ. "For example, the combi inverter-charger. This clever solution reduces the footprint of traditional setups, saving valuable space in your caravan or vehicle while also simplifying installation."

Enerdrive | Dometic products are designed to withstand Australia's tough environments, including the challenges of offroad and off-grid adventures. Many of its products incorporate active fan cooling technology, which ensures reliable operation even in extreme heat. This feature is particularly beneficial where confined spaces can cause devices to overheat.

Here's what Enerdrive | Dometic recommends for a dependable off-grid setup:

Lithium batteries

Your battery is the heart of your off-grid setup, supplying energy to everything from 12V fridges and LED lighting to power-hungry appliances like air conditioners and coffee machines. Enerdrive | Dometic's B-TEC lithium batteries are a favourite among Australian travellers due to their durability, safety features and advanced technology. Built with prismatic A-grade LiFePO4 lithium cells, these batteries ensure longevity, reliability and safety.

A standout feature of the B-TEC range is Bluetooth monitoring. Using the B-TEC app for iOS and Android, owners can wirelessly monitor their battery's charge status, allowing for better power usage management, especially when running multiple devices.

Inverter

To use household appliances such as kettles, toasters and induction cooktops, an inverter is necessary. This device converts DC power from the battery into 240V AC power, enabling all the conveniences of home appliances while away from mains power. Enerdrive | Dometic prioritises high performance and safety across all its products. Its inverters are designed to withstand the demanding conditions of off-grid adventures and come with built-in safety features like an RCD safety switch, similar to those found in home electrical systems. These switches add an extra layer of protection, making them safer and more reliable in remote environments.

DC-DC charger

A DC-DC charger is essential for keeping your house battery charged while driving. Drawing power from your vehicle and efficiently charging your house battery. Enerdrive | Dometic's DC-DC chargers feature built-in active fan cooling technology, ensuring the charger remains cool and performs optimally, preventing overheating and ensuring your battery is fully charged upon arrival.

Another key feature is the built-in MPPT solar charger, which automatically switches between vehicle charging and solar charging once you stop driving.

AC battery charger

Solar power is an excellent energy source, but sometimes weather conditions make it unreliable. An AC battery charger is a great backup, allowing users to recharge their house battery when 240V mains power is available. Enerdrive | Dometic's AC chargers are rugged and offer quick and efficient charging, with options ranging from 20Amp to 100Amp charge rates. These chargers feature intelligent algorithms that adjust power flow based on battery needs, ensuring fast charging while preserving battery life.

ABOVE AND RIGHT User-friendly controls; Inverters are necessary to use household appliances like kettles, coffee makers and toasters when away from mains power

Solar panels

For those who enjoy extended off-grid adventures, solar panels are an excellent addition. If the weather is in your favour, they can provide continuous source of power extending your stay as long as you choose.

Battery monitoring

Battery and system monitoring are also beneficial for tracking battery usage in real time. Monitoring power levels helps prevent battery depletion and allows for adjustments in energy usage to maximise your stay.

BUILT TO GROW WITH YOUR NEEDS

Enerdrive | Dometic prides itself on offering power systems that adapt to the growing demands and requirements of modern off-grid camping lifestyles.

"Our products are built to be adaptable, ensuring that as your needs change, your system can evolve with you. Whether you're looking to upgrade to a larger inverter, add an AC or DC-DC charger or expand with solar panels, Enerdrive | Dometic systems offer the flexibility to keep up with your lifestyle," said Paul.

COMMON OFF-GRID POWER MISTAKES

Heading offroad and off-grid is becoming increasingly popular among caravanners, but it's crucial to understand your power setup and usage before venturing too far from civilisation. When we asked the team at Enerdrive | Dometic about common off-grid power mistakes, here's what they shared:

- **Solar not meeting the demand:** Solar input not keeping up with your power consumption is quite common. You will rarely hear anyone say they've put too much solar on their van, only that they wish they had another panel or two. Maximising roof solar and utilising portable panels is a great solution.
- **Overloading the inverter:** Running too many 240V appliances at once can cause the inverter to trip. Understanding your inverter's power limits is essential.
- **Using more power than can be replenished:** High-power appliances like air-conditioners require careful energy management. If your system can't keep up, you may need to increase battery storage or improve your charging capabilities.

CALCULATING YOUR POWER NEEDS

Understanding your power consumption is essential when setting up an off-grid system. If your energy use exceeds your battery and charging capacity, you could find yourself running out of power at the worst possible time. Here's a simple way to calculate your power needs:

1. **Identify the devices you plan to run:** List all 12V and 240V appliances you intend to use.
2. **Calculate the power consumption:** Check the amp draw of each item to ensure your power system can meet your needs. You can use an online calculator or manually calculate it with this formula: amps = watts ÷ volts.
3. **Determine daily usage:** Multiply the amp draw by the estimated hours of use per day. For example, if a fridge draws 1A per hour in operation (1A x 24hr = 24Ah consumed), a 12V 100Ah lithium battery would keep it running continuously for at least three days (the amp usage will fluctuate, so this is a conservative estimate to be safe).
4. **Add everything up:** Sum the total amp-hours required per day to get a complete picture of your energy needs.
5. **Solar replenishment:** Now that you know how much your system uses, let's see what is required to replenish. Note: these are crude numbers. (Known load amps per day x 12V = watts per day) / (5hr average/day of solar [5hr during summer – 4hr for winter or lower states]) = solar required

Example 1: system usage 350A per day x 12V = 4200W ÷ 5hr = 840W of solar required

Example 2: system usage 350A per day x 12V = 4200W ÷ 4hr = 1050W of solar required

Note: This doesn't take into account if you have had bad weather, shading issues or efficiency losses.

To ensure reliable power, it's important to match your battery capacity and charging sources (solar, DC-DC, AC) to your energy consumption. If your system struggles to keep up, consider adding more solar panels, increasing battery capacity or upgrading your charging system.

CLEAR VIEW
ALL 4 ADVENTURE
BCF
"it's coffee time"

ABOVE AND RIGHT It's becoming more popular to have larger power systems to use multiple appliances when off-grid camping; The Enerdrive | Dometic B-TEC app allows users to wirelessly monitor their battery's charge status

> "To ensure reliable power, it's important to match *your battery capacity and charging sources (solar, DC-DC, AC) to your energy consumption"*

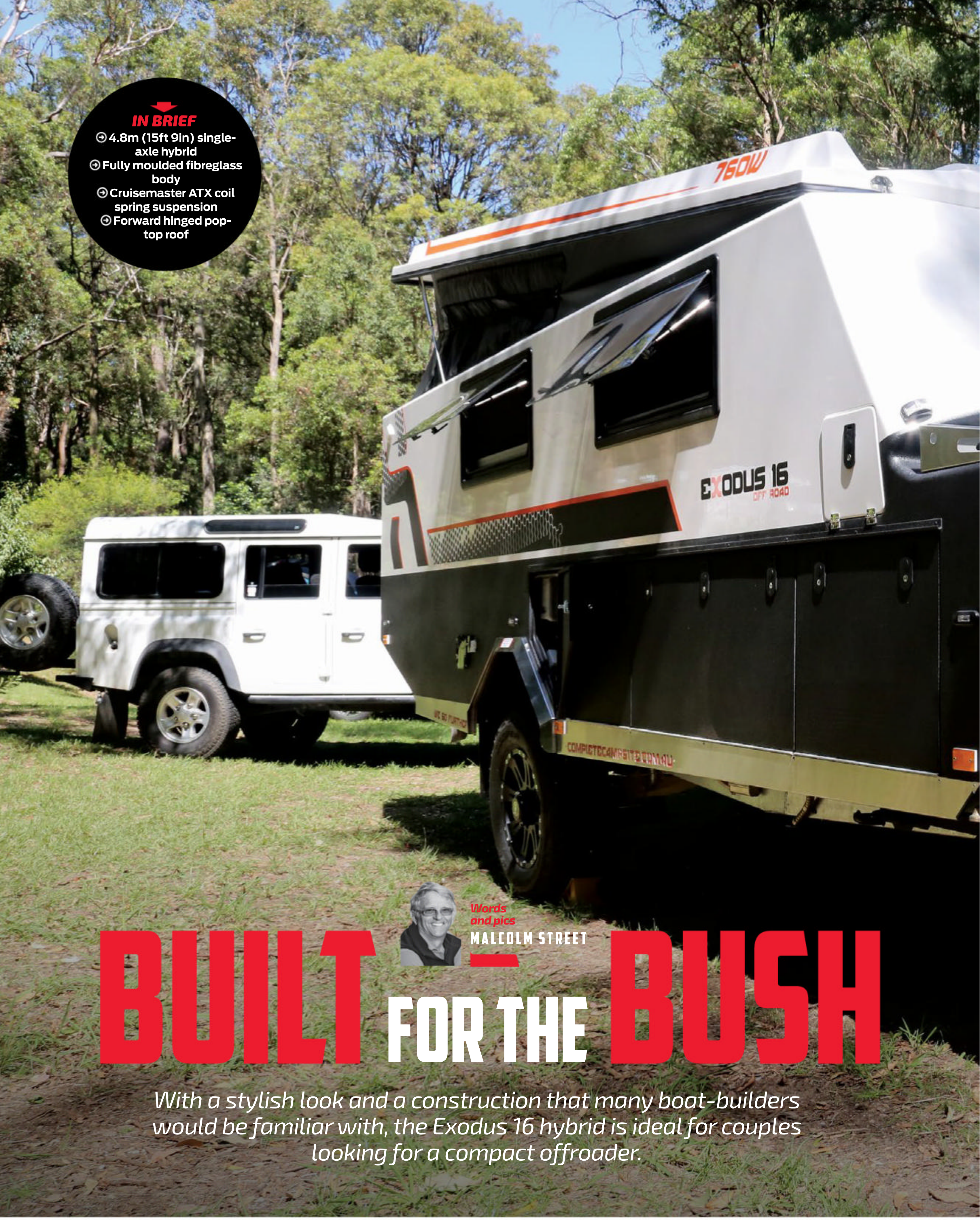
LARGER POWER SYSTEMS

One of our favourite questions is about any changes in the market or trends they've noticed. Paul says the ever-evolving market trend is larger power systems as everyone's power consumption while off-grid continues to increase. This increase is due to factors such as to technology improvements, working remotely, gasless vans and the improving comfort while staying in the bush, beach or the outback.

FUTURE-PROOFING YOUR SETUP

As off-grid travel and the trend of having plenty of creature comforts while on the road become more popular, investing in a reliable power system is essential. Expanding battery capacity, adding an inverter, solar panels, AC charger or DC-DC charger can be a great way to extend time away on your adventures, while also ensuring peace of mind that you won't end up in the dark.

To find out more about Enerdrive | Dometic and its range of products, head online: enerdrive.com.au


760W
EXODUS 16
OFF ROAD
COMPLETECAMPSITE.COM.AU

IN BRIEF

- 4.8m (15ft 9in) single-axle hybrid
- Fully moulded fibreglass body
- Cruisemaster ATX coil spring suspension
- Forward hinged pop-top roof

Words and pics
MALCOLM STREET

BUILT FOR THE BUSH

With a stylish look and a construction that many boat-builders would be familiar with, the Exodus 16 hybrid is ideal for couples looking for a compact offroader.

COMPLETE CAMPSITE .COM.AU

> “It’s built differently from most hybrids and caravans, using a technique *familiar to many boat builders and European caravan manufacturers”*

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Fully moulded fibreglass body
- Well-equipped external kitchen
- Longer than standard bed
- Composting toilet
- Storage capacity, inside and out

CONS

- Compact interior space
- Price point may not be for everyone

ABOVE AND BELOW New owners Jan and Chris relax under the awning of their new Exodus 16 hybrid; They were seeking a few more comforts

When I turned up to look over the Exodus 16 hybrid, I was a little surprised to find the very new owners, Jan Boswell and Chris Hill, there too, along with their dog, Sprocket. The couple was very excited about their brand-new hybrid and gave me some interesting insights into their reasons for purchase. They are old hands in recreational vehicle travel, having previously owned a Supreme caravan and, more recently, a Jurgens TuffTrax. One of the reasons for the Exodus 16 purchase was the couple’s desire to upsize to a slightly bigger van with better ensuite facilities. “We’re ageing gracefully,” Jan told me. “We wanted a few more comforts but without a large van to tow”.

THE BUILD

The Exodus 16 is built by the manufacturer formerly known as Complete Campsite. Unlike many hybrids, the Exodus is constructed entirely in Australia – Newcastle, NSW. It’s also built differently from most hybrids and caravans, using a technique familiar to many boat builders and European caravan manufacturers. The single-piece, hand-laid moulded fibreglass body forms the main structure with a hinged fibreglass roof on top. As any boat builder will tell you, it results in a strong structure, one that doesn’t have to rely totally on the chassis for build strength.

Underneath the body, the chassis is hot-dipped galvanised with 100mm (4in) RHS main rails and a 150mm (6in) drawbar. There’s less cross-member steelwork than most caravans/hybrids have. The sub-chassis area has a clean look, with nothing dangling down to get damaged on rough tracks. An option on the Exodus 16 is a bike rack designed to fit around the drawbar storage box. It’s quite a clever arrangement but requires a bit of physical ability to lift the bikes.

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- Cutting edge 3D designed through Solid Works, ensuring mm perfect engineering & results, everytime
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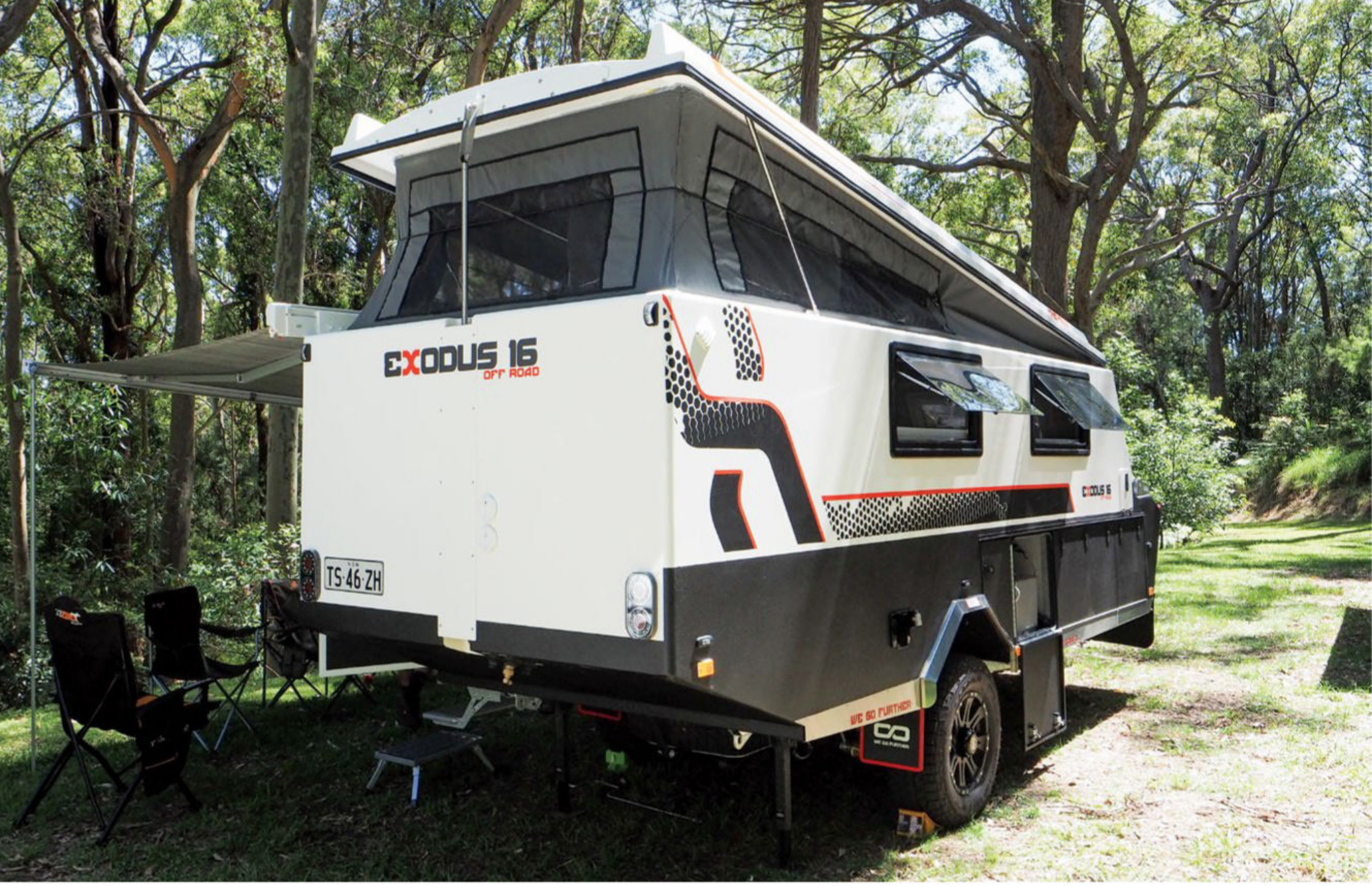
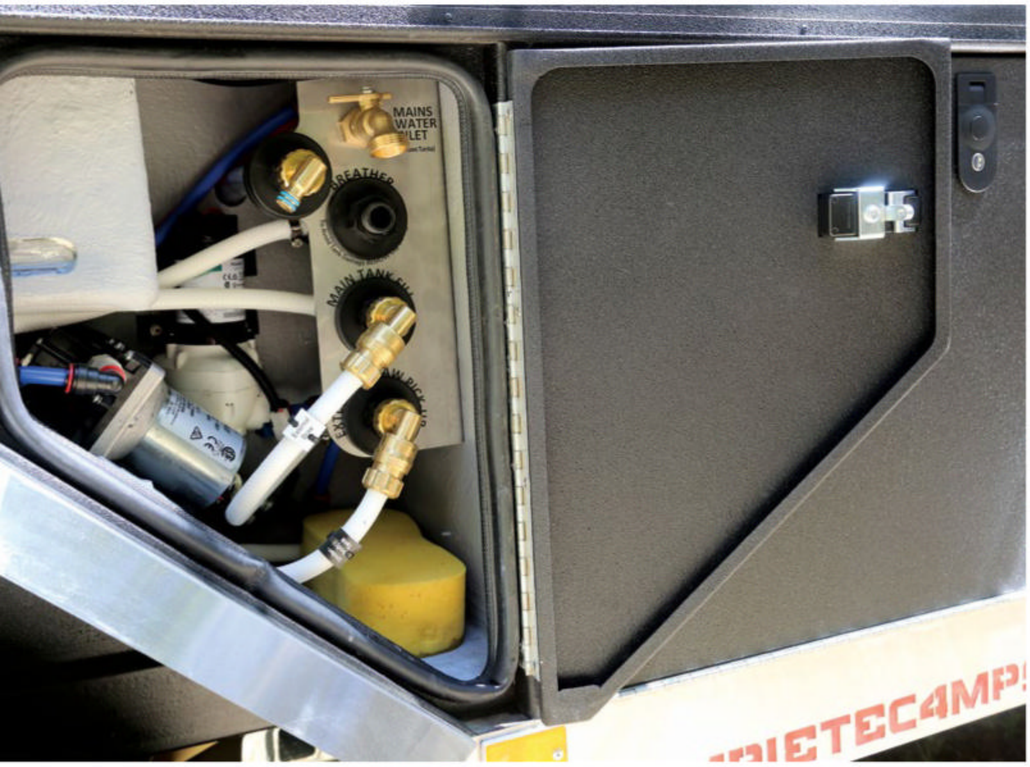


ABOVE AND BELOW The fibreglass roof is hinged and opens like a clam; Water tank fillers are readily accessible, yet out of sight

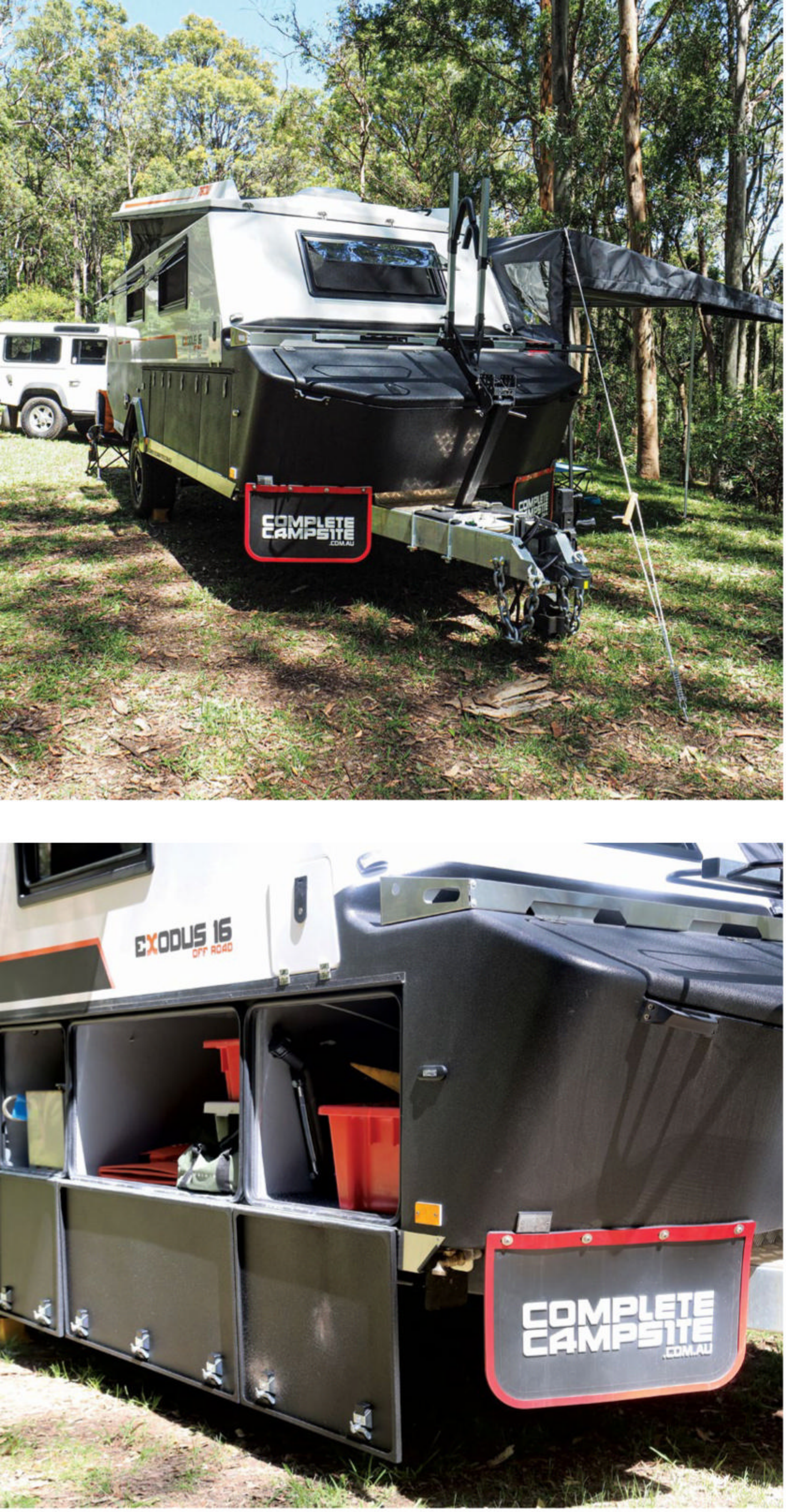
> *"The Exodus offers plenty of external storage ...* there are ample storage bins at the front and a drawbar storage box"



The hybrid has an ATM of 2800kg and a tare mass of 1850kg, resulting in a payload of 950kg, thus making it ideal for any dual cab ute or an older vehicle, like the Land Rover Defender that Chris likes to drive.

As an offroad hybrid, it's well-equipped in the suspension department with Cruisemaster ATX coil springs and shock absorbers. Cruisemaster also supplies the DO35 hitch. Then consider the narrow, compact design and you've got a nimble offroader that will fit down tight tracks with ease.

The Exodus offers plenty of external storage for a 4.8m (15ft 9in) van. There are ample storage bins at the front and a drawbar storage box – more than enough for all the bits and pieces carried on a camping trip. The gas cylinders have a compartment within the drawbar box. One of the external bins contains a diesel-fired Webasto EVO5 Hydronic water heater. Instead of directly heating the water, the EVO5 has a glycol tank that heats water via a heat exchange. Innovatively, the EVO5 can have a fan heater attached, which can be used as a space heater.



ABOVE AND BELOW Storage compartments and bike rack on the drawbar; Lots of external storage

STAYING OUTSIDE

Jan and Chris were looking for a good external kitchen – "we love living outdoors," Jan enthused. The Exodus 16 delivers with its slide-out stainless-steel kitchen that sits parallel to the van and rides on purpose-designed ball-bearing runners. In addition, there's a slide-out EvaKool 95L fridge and large slide-out stainless-steel drawers. It's a very impressive arrangement that includes a pantry area built into the wall of the hybrid. A clever little idea is the plastic table stored above the kitchen when travelling. The Fiamma awning covers the entire kitchen area.

EXODUS 16

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES
Body length 4.8m (15ft 9in)
Overall length 6.75m (22ft 2in)
Width 2.0m (6ft 7in)
Height 2.37m (7ft 9in)
Internal height 1.56m (5ft 2in)
Tare 1850kg
ATM 2800kg
Payload 950kg (calculated)
Ball weight at tare 190kg
Ball to tare ratio 10.3% (calculated)

EXTERNAL
Frame N/A
Cladding Moulded fibreglass
Chassis Hot dipped galvanised 100mm (4in) rails, 150mm (6in) drawbar
Suspension Cruisemaster ATX coil springs
Coupling Cruisemaster DO35
Brakes Dexter 12in electric
Wheels 17in alloy
Water 1 x 120L and 1 x 100L freshwater, 1 x 72L grey water
Battery 3 x 120Ah lithium LiFePO4
Solar 760W
Inverter 2000W
Air-conditioner Optional
Gas 2 x 4.5kg
Sway control N/A
Cooking Smev three-burner
Fridge EvaKool 95L dual zone

INTERNAL
Cooking N/A
Fridge N/A
Bathroom Composting toilet in combo bathroom
Washing machine N/A
Hot water Webasto EVO5 Hydronic diesel water and space heater

PRICE FROM $136,550

OPTIONS FITTED
- Internal ensuite
- Bike racks

PRICE AS SHOWN $139,147.50

MORE INFORMATION
Complete Campsite / Exodus Off Road Campers
39B Munibung Road
Cardiff NSW 2285
P: 0412 656 271
W: completecampsite.com.au

"A bed occupies most of the front area, but that still leaves plenty of *room for the pair of seats, corner ensuite and rear kitchen*"

ABOVE The Lagun-mounted dining table can be easily moved around

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
It's hidden, but much of the value in this hybrid van lies in the engineering and building

TOWABILITY
Easy towing by a wide range of mid-sized vehicles

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
It is well designed for getting outback, either on rough roads or smooth highways

BUILD QUALITY
A few minor issues, but the overall structure is good

LIVEABILITY
Adequate interior space and well set up for the outdoor lifestyle

SELF SUFFICIENCY
High capacity 12V electrical system along with the composting toilet means that the water usage is the real limiter

CUSTOMER CARE
Two years manufacturer warranty, lifetime on chassis and body structure. OEM warranty on items like suspension and windows

INNOVATION
Moulded fibreglass body structure with lighter weight chassis

X-FACTOR
A great looking and well set up hybrid

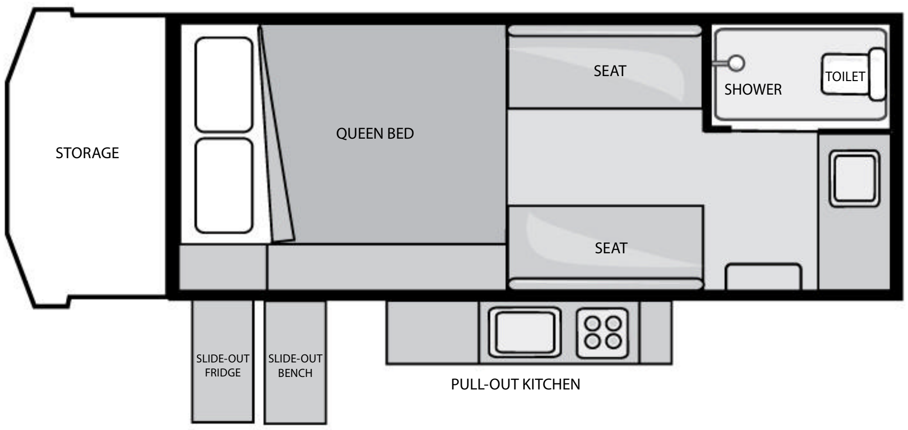
STEP ABOARD

Setting up the hybrid doesn't take long, particularly as an electrically operated actuator raises the roof. Inside, the layout is quite simple. A bed occupies most of the front area, but that still leaves plenty of room for the pair of seats, corner ensuite and rear kitchen.

The bed, measuring 2.05m x 1.53m (6ft 7in x 5ft), sits off the floor somewhat but is easily accessed by using the seats on both sides as a step. The bed head has wand reading lights on both sides and device charger points. Behind the pillow are a couple of storage compartments.

Around the bed, good-sized windows are fitted into the front and offside walls. There's a smaller window on the nearside, mainly because some helpful cupboard space fills the rest of the wall area. For extra ventilation, there's a fan hatch in the ceiling. Behind the floor hatch under the bed is where the battery charger, inverter and associated electrics are to be found.

Two people will comfortably sit in the twin lounges. When mealtime comes around, the Lagun-mounted table is easily fitted into position. Like the bed, there are windows on both sides, with the extra bonus of screened windows in the roof gusset above.



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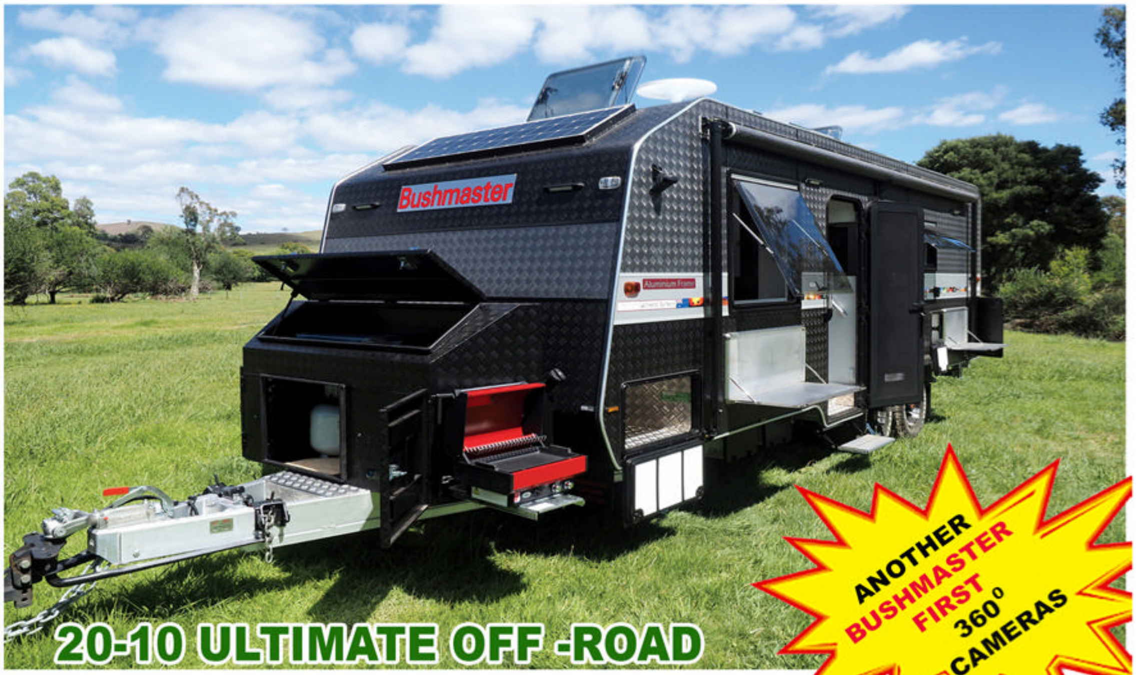
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24. UPHOLSTERY, NSW LEATHER "REAL LEATHER"
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27. LOTS OF BENCH SPACE + 7 DRAWER
28. 1 1/2 BOWL SINK, 274 LT. COMPRESSOR FRIDGE
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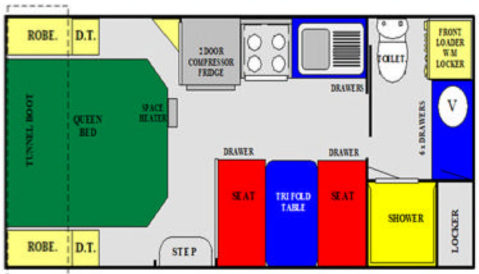
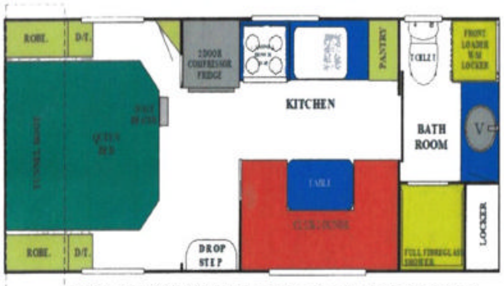
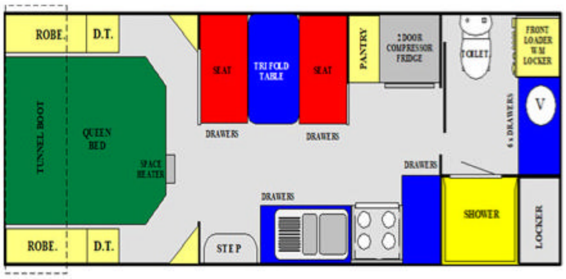
THE LIST GOES ON. "IT'S A BUSHMATER SO IT'S "AUSTRALIA'S TOUGHEST OFF ROAD CARAVANS!"


ROBE.
D.T.
2 DOOR COMPRESSOR FRIDGE
TOILET.
FRONT LOADER W.M LOCKER
DRAWERS
TUNNEL BOOT
QUEEN BED
SPACE HEATER
6 x DRAWERS
V
DRAWER
DRAWER
SEAT
TRI FOLD TABLE
SEAT
SHOWER
LOCKER
ROBE.
D.T.
STEP

18' 10"


ROBE.
D.T.
2 DOOR COMPRESSOR FRIDGE
PANTRY
TOILET
FRONT LOADER W.M LOCKER
KITCHEN
BATH ROOM
V
TUNNEL BOOT
QUEEN BED
TABLE
LOCKER
ROBE.
D.T.
DROP STEP
FULL FIBREGLASS SHOWER

19' 10" WITH CLUB LOUNGE


ROBE.
D.T.
SEAT
TRI FOLD TABLE
SEAT
PANTRY
2 DOOR COMPRESSOR FRIDGE
TOILET.
FRONT LOADER W.M LOCKER
TUNNEL BOOT
QUEEN BED
DRAWERS
DRAWERS
6 x DRAWERS
V
SPACE HEATER
DRAWERS
DRAWERS
SHOWER
LOCKER
ROBE.
D.T.
STEP

20' 10"

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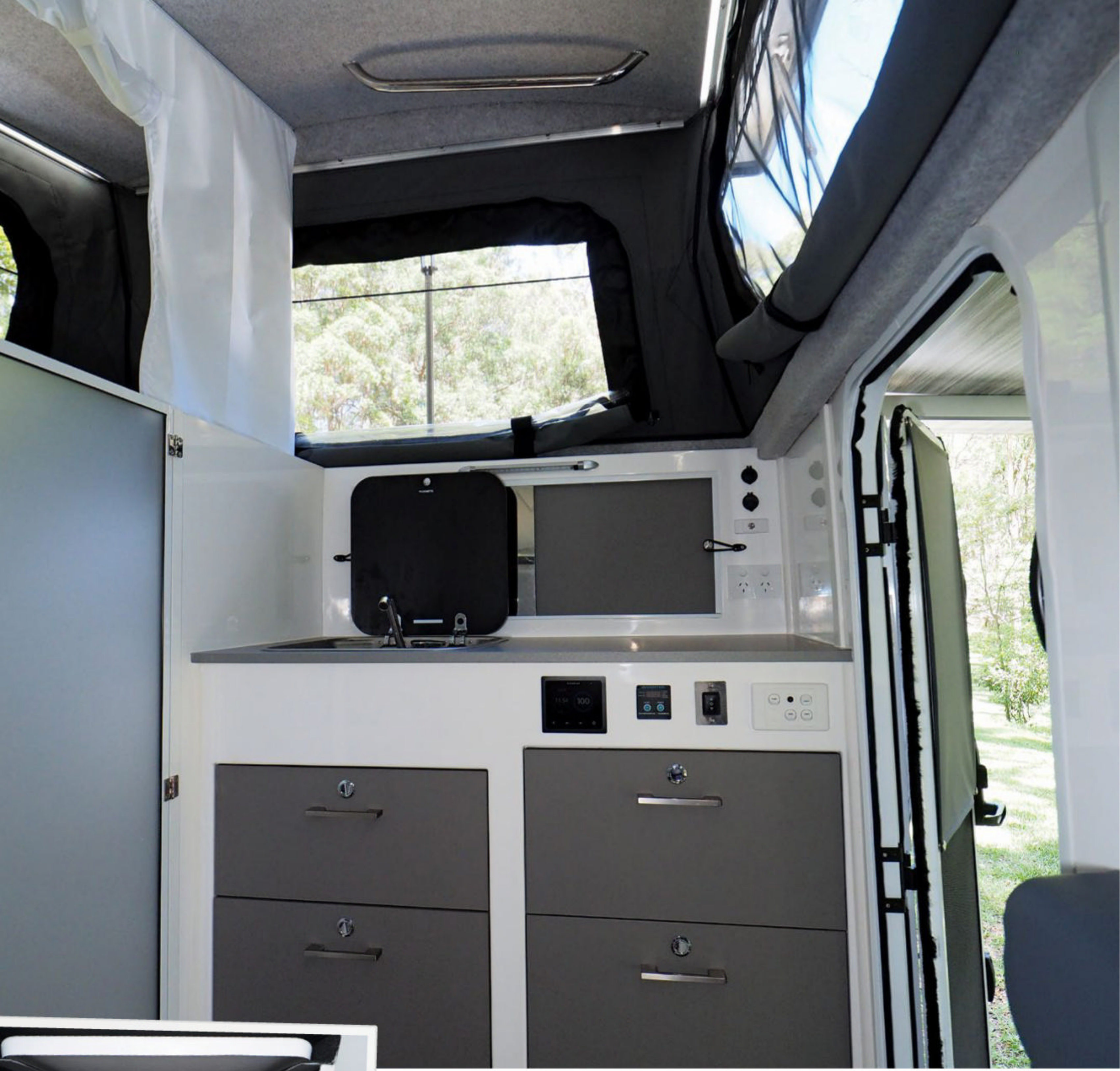


CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Electrics access; Compact kitchen at the rear; The add-on canvas ensuite is standard

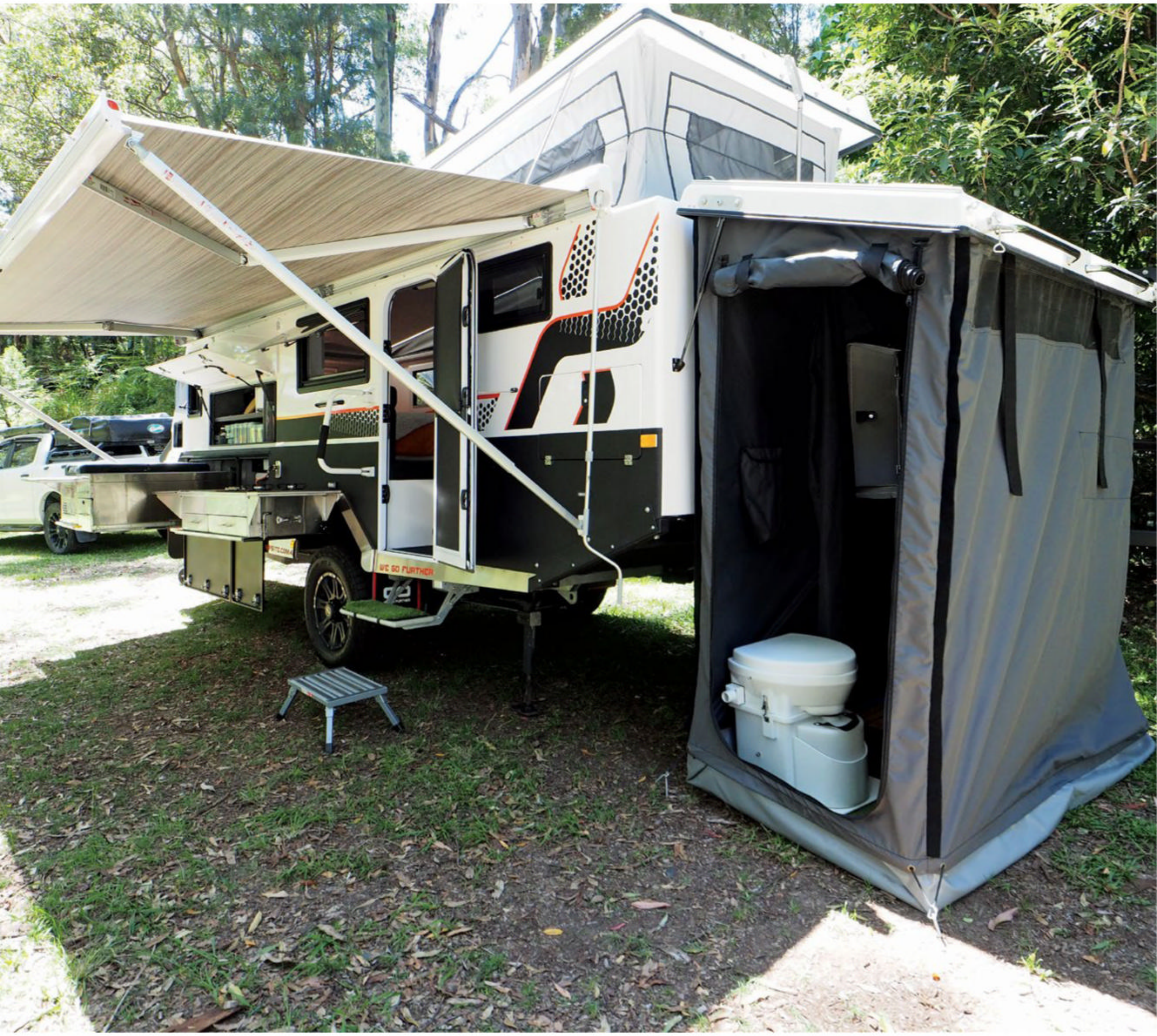
COMPACT BUT CONVENIENT

Across the rear, the compact nature of this rig is obvious. There's a small kitchen with a smoked glass-topped stainless-steel sink. That leaves a nominal amount of benchtop area but a more generous amount of drawer capacity. Under the benchtop is where a Simarine touchpad, inverter controls, light switches and a roof switch are located. That, in addition to the 240V power point and charger hub above, makes it the electrical centre of the van.

Jan and Chris like the internal bathroom's convenience. They find the shower as comfortable as you'd expect and are getting used to the composting toilet, which they haven't used before. "We like the self-sufficiency capability," Chris told me, "It's better than a cassette toilet."

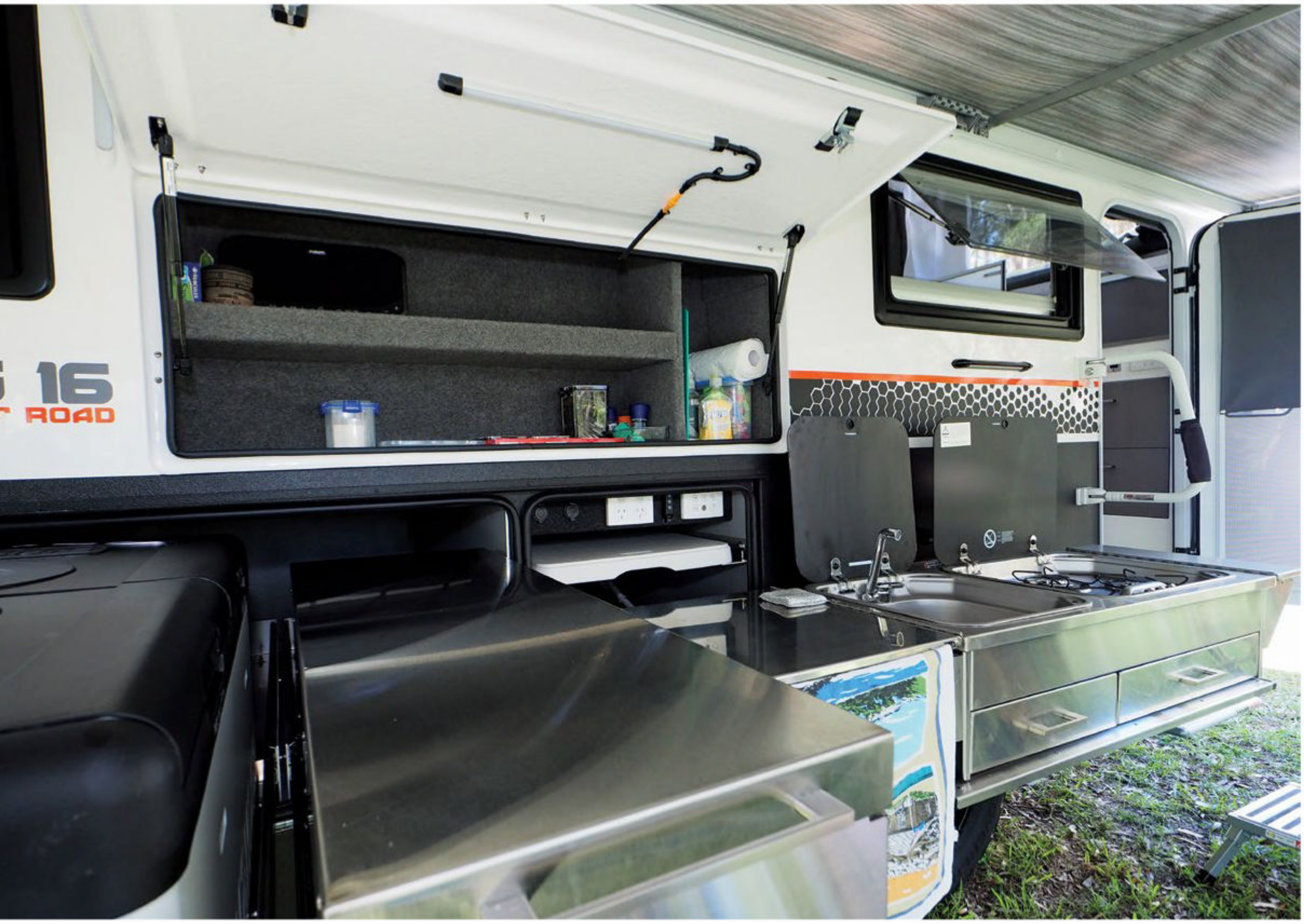
On the subject of self-sufficiency, the Exodus 16 is well equipped electrically. There are three 120Ah lithium LiFePO4 batteries, 760W of solar panel capacity and a 2000W inverter. Given the hybrid van has a gas hob and no air-conditioner, that's plenty of capacity for extended stays off the grid, provided a little bit of care is taken with water usage – the main freshwater tank has a 120L capacity and there is a 100L underbody tank for 220L total.

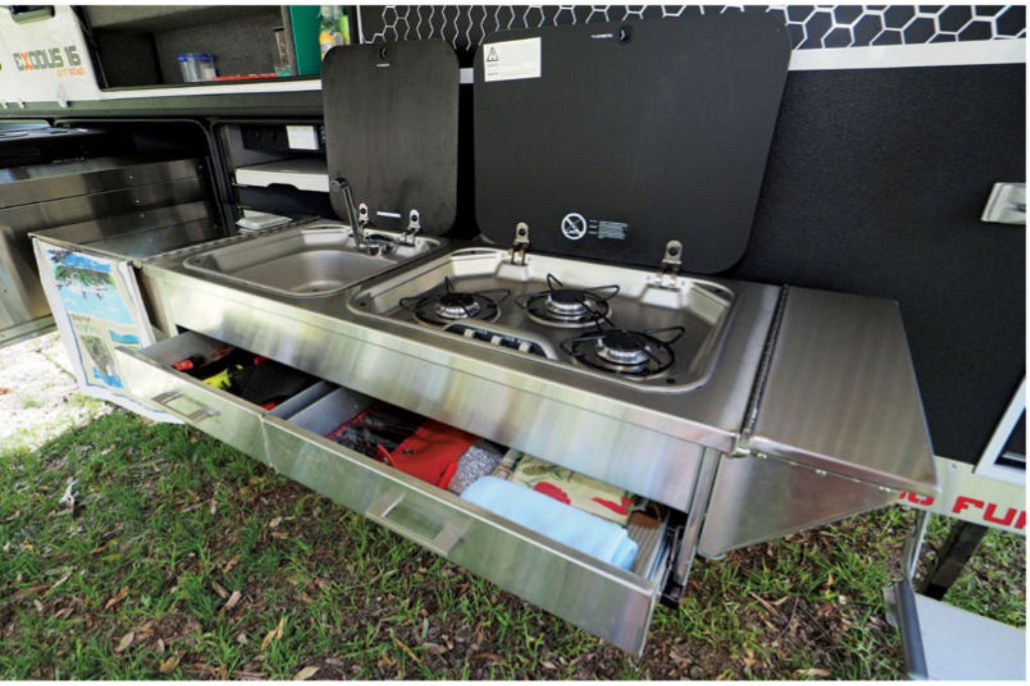
> *"The Exodus 16 is well equipped electrically.* There are three 120Ah lithium LiFePO4 batteries, 760W of solar panel capacity and a 2000W inverter"



External ensuite

Although my review van had an internal ensuite, it's an option included on this reviewed model. In standard form, the Exodus 16 has an external canvas ensuite that fits along the rear wall. It comes complete with a toilet and shower but does add to the setup time. Not having an internal ensuite does give more space inside, but for a couple I know what I'd be opting for!





ABOVE AND BELOW The external kitchen was one of the attractions for Chris and Jan; Stainless-steel stovetop, sink, benches and drawers

CUSTOMER CARE

Exodus Off Road Campers offers a lifetime warranty on the chassis and GRP (aka fibreglass moulded) body. There's a two-year warranty on all other work done by Exodus. The original manufacturer's warranty covers items like the electrical fittings and windows. Warranty work must be handled by Exodus.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Chris and Jan have travelled extensively. I asked them their favourite destination, and they said, "anywhere with blue sky and red dirt". There's no doubt that Exodus 16 is well-equipped for a destination like that. What impressed me was the overall build of the hybrid van, particularly the moulded fibreglass body and the weight-saving features. If the aim is to have a compact van that can travel narrow offroad tracks, offer a primarily external lifestyle with a few internal comforts – that's what the Exodus 16 offers, and exactly what Jan and Chris wanted.

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BEST FAMILY HYBRID
★★★

WHY I LOVE THE EXODUS 16 -

- Let's hear from Chris and Jan

"For me it was the outside kitchen, the fact that everything was there. From my view I didn't want to be stuck inside because all the action happens outside, and the outside kitchen means you are a part of it." – Jan

"I would say the easier way of doing things such as the switch that makes the roof go up and this awning is easy to put out unlike others, so it is a combination of easier things to do." – Chris

*"We're always researching what our next camper will be, but it wasn't until we went into towns like Thargomindah or Eromanga that we saw the off-road Exodus 16 camper and knew it was the one."
- Chris*

For Exodus sales and general enquiries, please contact us on
Phone: 0412 656 271 | Email: david@bwcy.com.au | 39B Munibung Road, Cardiff NSW 2285

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MAIN Saint Aloysius Church, Sevenhill

THE REGION FOR ALL SEASONS

South Australia's mid north overflows with food, wine, history and stunning scenic views.

Words **GRANT AND LINDA HANAN** *Pics* **LINDA HANAN AND SUPPLIED**

Traveller
Sensation
S707·TAP

ABOVE AND BELOW Checking in at Discovery Parks – Clare Caravan and Holiday Park; Pedal power along the Riesling Trail

A little more than two hours from Adelaide, South Australia's mid north is the type of destination that will have you feeling like you're in the country in next to no time. Once past the historical township of Gawler, a picturesque farmland landscape awaits, and coincidentally where vehicle traffic drops off nicely. Travelling nearer to our home away from home for a few nights, the Clare Valley is full of quaint country towns steeped in history. While the valley is world-famous for its riesling, we found there's much more to the mid north than simply being wine country.

Upon arriving in Clare, we found our way to the Discovery Parks - Clare Caravan and Holiday Park, a popular spot for caravanners, RVers and campers. As our base for a few nights, we found the sites well-spaced apart and the grounds quite green during our summer visit. The school holidays had also not long ended, allowing us to set up comfortably without feeling like we were on top of any neighbours.

With the caravan park adjacent to the region's visitor centre, we only had a short walk to learn about local attractions and highlights. As it turned out, we didn't need to walk far for wine tasting either. And luckily for us, we had timed our visit perfectly. The visitor centre was hosting a local winery for happy hour, and guests could taste some local wines within a stone's throw of the caravan park. No need to get behind the wheel and being able to chat with other caravanners while tasting local wines for a couple of hours turned out to be a perfect way to spend a Friday afternoon.

"Clare Valley is full of quaint country towns steeped in history"

ABOVE Sir Hubert Wilkins Homestead

THE RIESLING TRAIL

Another reason for our visit to the Clare Valley was to ride some of its picturesque Riesling Trail which follows a former railway line dating back more than a century before finally being dismantled during the late 1980s. The 35km bicycle trail runs from Auburn in the south and ends 7km north of Clare, passing through towns full of old-world charm and adjacent to some award-winning wineries. Whether you're a cycling enthusiast or simply looking to stretch your legs, visitors can ride as much (or as little) of the trail, as there are frequent entry and exit points. It's a shady trail that meanders through the valley and passes numerous vineyards along the way. We loved stopping at the storyboards along the trail as well, as they provided loads of information about the region. If you don't have a bike, that's not a problem, as bike hire is available in Clare. Whether you prefer a mountain bike, hybrid (a cross between a road bike and a mountain bike), or a deluxe style e-bike, they cater for all.

CLARE VALLEY WINERIES

As good as it was having happy hour at the visitor centre, we couldn't resist visiting the Clare Valley without at least dropping into a winery, or two. You certainly won't find it difficult to locate cellar doors between the towns of Auburn and Clare, as there are more than three dozen along this corridor alone. While the region is famous for its exceptional riesling, we find it hard to go past others like the cabernet and shiraz. The Clare Valley has the Jesuit priests to thank because they were the ones who brought winemaking skills and planted the first grapes less than 20 years after South Australia was established.

Their flourishing winery at Sevenhill makes it one of the oldest wineries in Australia. From our experience, visiting here is a delight for any wine enthusiast. Besides tasting their award-winning wines, visitors can experience their underground wine cellar, a fabulous wine museum, and the quaint St Aloysius Church located on site. Aside from these, there are also beautiful gardens surrounding the cellar door precinct, where we blissfully rested our weary bike legs with a glass of crisp chilled riesling and a cheese platter.

> *"With some cellar doors having accompanying restaurants, it's easy enough to sit back and enjoy fine dining among the vines"*

PLANT SALE
MARKET

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Exploring the grounds at Sevenhill Cellars; Visitors can head underground at Sevenhill Cellars; Visiting one of Clare's lookouts; Markets are popular with locals and visitors

GASTRONOMIC DELIGHTS

With some cellar doors having accompanying restaurants, it's easy enough to sit back and enjoy fine dining among the vines. You'll find everything from a plate to have with mates to gourmet-style fine dining, and everything in between. So, there's no chance you'll go hungry in the valley because there are also plenty of choices at local town hotels, restaurants and bistros. Although having a bit of a sweet tooth, we were tempted by the cafes and bakeries in Clare and Sevenhill. The long-established Little Red Grape Bakery in Sevenhill is one of these gems, as its sweet and savoury selection is simply out of this world. I'll confess we visited this bakery on more than one occasion this trip, but I'm not sure we ever did enough bike riding to work off all the calories we consumed!

The region's country markets are another area highlight with many held around SA's mid north each month. Food stalls and local produce are big ticket items at the markets, where we picked up a basket full of jams, artisan bread and enormous free-range eggs. Besides food, we also thought the range of gifts, soaps and local crafts found at the market were exceptional.

CLARE VALLEY ATTRACTIONS

You could be right in thinking we ate and drank our way around the valley, although we did manage to squeeze in a bit of bike riding and walking here and there too. We found by taking a stroll through a few of the local towns, it was good to come across numerous old 19th century buildings that had been lovingly restored. We were particularly drawn to an early settler's cottage at Penwortham which belonged to the pastoralist and explorer, John Horrocks. Built in 1839, the cottage is one of the oldest stone buildings in South Australia and now a museum.

Not far from Penwortham is the quaint village town of Mintaro. Home of the very impressive Martindale Hall, this 1879 Georgian-style manor dominates the landscape when approaching the homestead grounds. However, to appreciate the best of the Clare Valley views, we headed up to Quarry Hill and Neagles Rock lookouts located on the outskirts of Clare. Although both lookouts were very windy during our visit, the views of the valley below are extraordinary.

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LEARN MORE

ABOVE A contrast of colours during warm summer months

FAST FACTS

Burra and Goyder Visitor Information Centre
2 Market Square
Burra SA 5417
P: 08 8892 2154
W: visitburra.com

Clare Valley Wine, Food and Tourism Centre
8 Spring Gully Road
Clare SA 5453
P: 1800 242 131
W: clarevalley.com.au

Discovery Parks – Clare Caravan and Holiday Park
8511 Horrocks Highway
Clare SA 5453
P: 08 8842 2724
W: discoveryholidayparks.com.au

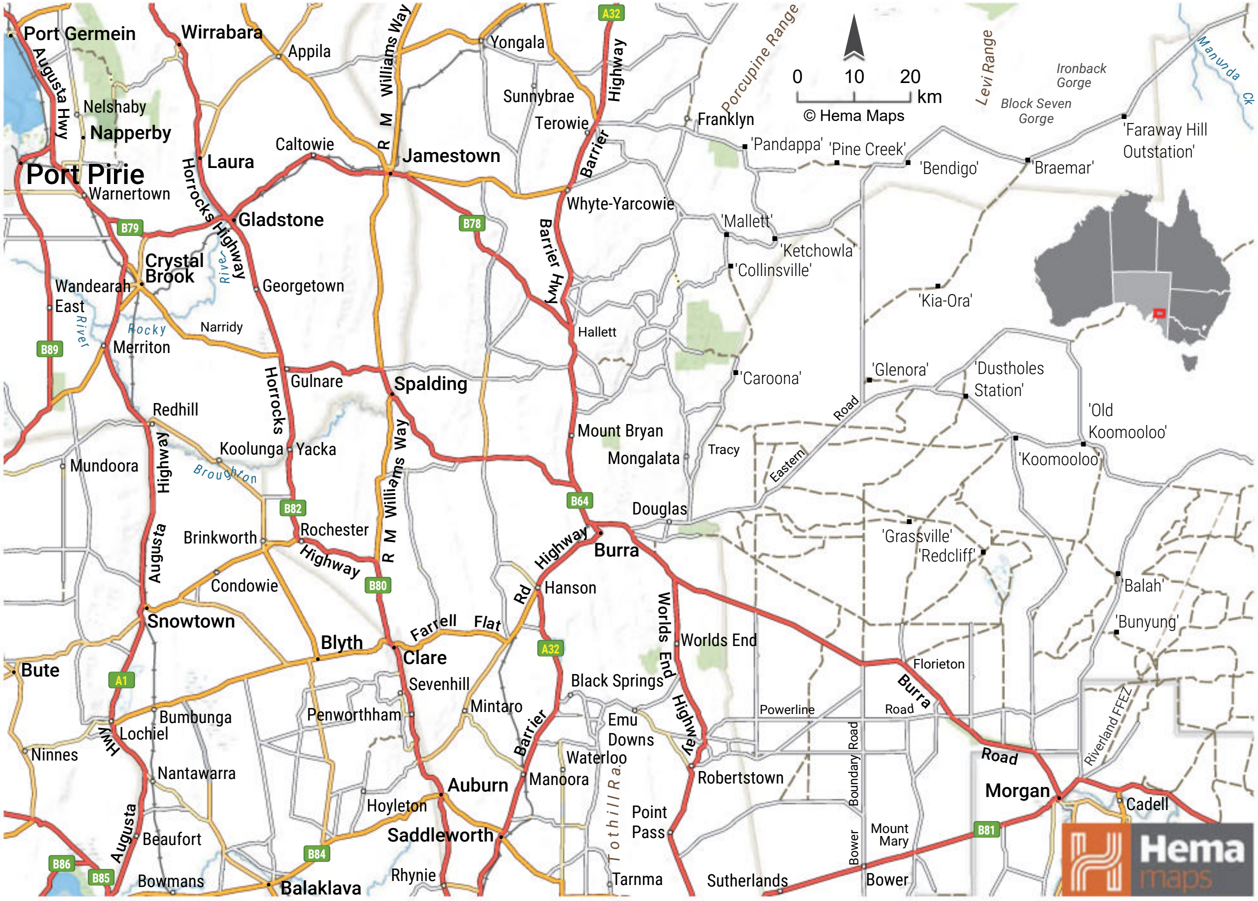
Hallett Country Store
20 Alfred Street
Hallett SA 5419
P: 08 8894 2078
W: facebook.com/barrierhighway

John Horrocks Cottage
7884 Horrocks Highway
Penwortham SA 5453
P: 08 8843 0140
W: clarevalley.com.au/directory/john-horrocks-cottage

Little Red Grape Bakery
148 Main N Road
Sevenhill SA 5453
P: 08 8843 4088
W: facebook.com/LittleRedGrapeBakery

Martindale Hall
1127B Min-Man Road, Mintaro, SA 5415
P: 0417 838 897
W: martindalehall.com.au

Sevenhill Cellars
111C College Road
Sevenhill SA 5453
P: 08 8843 5900
W: sevenhill.com.au


Port Germein
Wirrabara
Appila
Yongala
Nelshaby
Napperby
Port Pirie
Warnertown
Laura
Caltowie
Jamestown
Sunnybrae
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Crystal Brook
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Georgetown
Whyte-Yarcowie
Hallett
Narridy
Merriton
Gulnare
Spalding
Redhill
Koolunga
Yacka
Mundoora
Mount Bryan
Mongalata
Tracy
Brinkworth
Rochester
Condowie
Douglas
Burra
Hanson
Snowtown
Blyth
Clare
Sevenhill
Bute
Bumbunga
Lochiel
Penworthham
Mintaro
Black Springs
Worlds End
Emu Downs
Waterloo
Manoora
Ninnes
Nantawarra
Auburn
Hoyleton
Saddleworth
Beaufort
Bowmans
Balaklava
Rhynie
Point Pass
Tarnma
Robertstown
Sutherlands
Mount Mary
Bower
Morgan
Cadell
Florieton
Powerline
Franklyn
'Pandappa'
'Pine Creek'
'Bendigo'
'Braemar'
'Faraway Hill Outstation'
'Mallett'
'Ketchowla'
'Collinsville'
'Kia-Ora'
'Caroona'
'Glenora'
'Dustholes Station'
'Old Koomooloo'
'Koomooloo'
'Grassville'
'Redcliff'
'Balah'
'Bunyung'
Porcupine Range
Levi Range
Ironback Gorge
Block Seven Gorge
Manunda Ck
0 10 20 km
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BURRA HERITAGE

For a fabulous day out, we took a road trip to the neighbouring town of Burra which is less than 30 minutes away from Clare. Initially put on the map after copper was discovered in 1845, a mine was soon established that employed nearly 1000 men. Kooringa (which later had its name changed to Burra) rapidly grew as a result of what was called the 'Monster Mine'. Interestingly, by 1851, Burra was Australia's largest inland town. While the copper mining ceased years ago, the town today still preserves its old-world charm and has a welcoming heritage trail. We found the Burra Heritage Passport (available from the Burra and Goyder Visitor Information Centre), an excellent choice for exploring the town and its surroundings. With a map and key in hand, we soaked in no less than a dozen local attractions at our own pace and in the comfort of our vehicle. We found the heritage trail covered a variety of interesting sites including Redruth Gaol, Burra Smelter, Unicorn Brewery Cellars, plus multiple museums.

Another attraction along the historic trail was visiting the miners' dugouts. With the rapid development of the town in 1851, there was a significant shortage of housing for the miners and their families. It's hard to imagine that nearly 2000 people lived in tiny dugouts along the town's creek living in most unsanitary conditions for almost 10 years. There are only a few of the dugouts remaining today; all of which are quite fragile. Our day at Burra and taking in the Burra Heritage Passport ended up being a full-day affair. We loved how it offered remarkable insights into the region's history and was a real trip highlight.

> ***"By 1851, Burra was Australia's largest inland town"***

ABOVE AND BELOW Martindale Hall at Mintaro; Morphett's Enginhouse Museum in Burra

ABOVE Woolshed ruins at Ketchowla Homestead

> ***"You'll find the Dare's Hill Driving Circuit Drive has stunning panoramas of rolling hills, especially at the summit"***

OTHER TRAILS

Besides our day at Burra, we found the variety of attractions and other trails to be another highlight for visiting SA's mid north. The Dare's Hill Driving Circuit Drive between the mid north towns of Hallett and Terowie was one that had piqued our interest for some time. You'll find the Dare's Hill Driving Circuit Drive has stunning panoramas of rolling hills, especially at the summit. Located less than an hour's drive from Clare, this 91km unsealed dirt road circuit passes through two quite distinctive terrains. Where vast areas of salt bush, blue bush and Mallee woodland are found along the circuit in the north, large acreages of vibrant green grasses and colourful crops can be found further to the south.

Choosing to travel the trail in a clockwise direction, the old 1800s Ketchowla Homestead and woolshed ruins made the perfect destination for a coffee stop break. A little further on we explored the old ruins of Piltimitiappa Homestead – the home of early settler, William Dare (and where the driving trail gets its name). Less than 5km further on, a steep and winding ascent leads you to the summit of Dares Hill. Taking time to drink in the breathtaking views of the surrounding landscape here is a must.

Further on, other attractions include the old Mount Bryan school and church. The small community of Mount Bryan is best remembered as the birthplace of adventurer and polar explorer, Sir Hubert Wilkins. The homestead that he was born at Mount Bryan East has been restored, and visitors can look inside by collecting a key from the Hallett Country Store.

SUMMING UP

As far as destinations go, South Australia's mid north has a lot going for it. So, if you're looking for somewhere within SA that's jam-packed full of history, magnificent wineries and eateries, and overflows with natural attractions for two legs, two wheels or more, this region offers the full package.

NEW PRODUCT

iTECHWORLD
THE POWER EXPERT
iTECH240X PRO
LITHIUM LIFEPO4
12.8V | 240AH | 3072WH

POWER AT YOUR FINGERTIPS

Our flagship X-Range and Super Slim (SS) Range lithium batteries just got an upgrade—now with Bluetooth compatibility. Engineered with advanced LiFePO4 technology, our lithium deep-cycle batteries offer unparalleled performance and reliability, setting a new industry standard.

A standout feature of the X-Range is its versatility. Designed and developed in Australia for Australian conditions, these batteries are a true drop-in replacement, seamlessly integrating into your existing setup without requiring modifications. With an impressive IP67 waterproof rating, they're built to withstand harsh conditions, from under your vehicle's bonnet to external mounting on caravans and boats. Their superior water and vibration resistance makes them ideal for aquatic applications, ensuring consistent power and peace of mind.

The SS Range is designed for cramped installations, making it perfect for fitting inside areas once thought too tight or unusable. Our slimmest model measures just 30mm thick! Like the X-Range, these batteries are true drop-in replacements, offering flexible installation without system overhauls.

These Bluetooth-enabled batteries cater to various needs, from the compact iTECH100SS with 100Ah usable capacity to the powerhouse iTECH400X PRO with 400Ah usable capacity, fitting where a 200Ah lead-acid battery would. The all-new iTECH240X PRO, with its 240Ah capacity and Bluetooth connectivity, bridges the gap between these models, providing ample power for extended trips while maintaining a compact footprint. Whether powering a dinghy, cruiser, or yacht, the X and SS Ranges deliver reliable energy for marine and off-grid setups. Need more power? Connect these batteries in series to scale from 12V to 48V—ideal for running trolling motors.

Never guess your battery's health again! The X and SS Ranges now feature integrated Bluetooth, allowing real-time monitoring via the iTechworld Connect Battery Management App. Track battery health, capacity, voltage, current, and temperature effortlessly—all without reception or internet, making it perfect for off-grid adventures.

The X and SS Ranges provide maximum efficiency, with a 100% usable capacity compared to traditional batteries, which allow only 50% usage. Their lightweight design reduces vehicle load, while their 10,000* cycle lifespan far outperforms traditional AGM batteries, which average around 600 cycles. Compliant with Australian and international safety standards, including IEC:62619, these batteries are built for reliability and longevity. Plus, with a 5-year Australian warranty, you can trust in their durability.

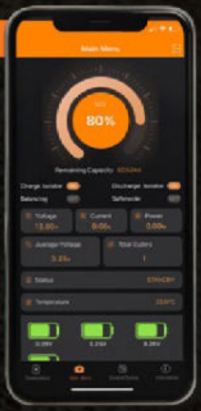
iTechworld's new Bluetooth-compatible lithium batteries are redefining adventure power. They're a true game-changer for any setup with superior performance, seamless integration, and effortless management.

Ready to charge up your adventure with iTechworld's latest batteries? Upgrade today for unbeatable performance, reliability, and smooth integration. Call the Power Experts at iTechworld now!

*5000+ at 50%.10000+ at 100%.

KEY FEATURES

- Bluetooth compatible
- 100% usable capacity
- 5 year Australian warranty
- Designed and developed in Australia
- IEC:62619 certified



THE POWER EXPERT

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POWER WHEN YOU NEED IT

Designed by Australians for use by Australians who love caravanning, camping and remote outback travel, iTechworld is a leader in the off-grid, outdoor power sector.

Words Editorial Team Pics Supplied

With increased numbers of caravanners choosing to take the more remote roads less travelled on their adventures, having a tough and reliable power system on board has never been more important.

Perth-based iTechworld stands out as a leader in the power solutions market by offering a wide range of products designed and built specifically to Australian needs. Whether it's lithium batteries and portable power stations to solar panels and inverters, iTechworld has every contingency covered.

"We are focused on meeting the unique needs of our off-grid users, resulting in intuitive and dependable products," said iTechworld technical writer, Bailey Burke.

"iTechworld's products are designed by Australians, for Australians and tough Aussie conditions. From inception, products are made with the Australian climate, environment and challenges in mind – from our IP67 batteries to our vibration and heat-dispersing casings and energy management systems, everything we make is to the outback's standards."

Unlike traditional hardwired systems, iTechworld's portable dual-battery alternatives – such as the PS2000 power station – provide reliable, high-capacity power without complex installations. Designed for flexibility, the PS2000 ensures stable, efficient energy for everything from camping setups to intensive applications such as Starlink, giving users the freedom to power their adventures anywhere.

ITECHWORLD PRODUCTS

iTechworld provides an extensive range of off-grid power solutions and battery management products tailored for caravanning, camping and remote travel.

Lithium deep cycle batteries: iTechworld's lithium batteries are lightweight, maintenance-free and deliver a stable power source until fully discharged. Unlike traditional lead-acid batteries, which only allow partial discharge before performance drops, iTechworld's lithium batteries offer 100 per cent usable capacity. This means you can use the full charge without worrying about voltage drops or battery damage, maximising efficiency and extending time off-grid.

Portable power stations: For those seeking versatility, iTechworld's portable power stations are compact yet powerful, capable of simultaneously powering multiple devices or appliances such as 12V fridge freezers. They can be recharged through various methods, including AC mains, car sockets, solar panels, generators or other batteries, making them highly adaptable for off-grid situations.

iTECHWORLD

LEFT AND ABOVE Portable solar panels are a great addition to any camping setup; 1800W PRO Portable Lithium Power Station

> “The iTECH300SS Super Slim battery has a slim profile and substantial 300Ah capacity *to provide ample power for extended off-grid adventures*”

Solar panels and blankets: To capture the sun’s energy, iTechworld offers a range of solar panels and blankets which come in various configurations, including solar blankets with outputs between 20W and 300W, hard-frame solar panels and flexible solar panels. Select models feature HPX PRO technology, ensuring maximum efficiency and performance even in low-light conditions, while the proprietary Raptor Skin cell coating enhances durability and weather resistance, making them ideal for Australia’s harsh environments.

Inverters: iTechworld’s Pure Sine Wave inverters are designed to convert DC power from batteries into AC power, allowing users to run standard household appliances during their travels. This ensures that even in remote locations, travellers can enjoy the comforts of home.

Complete off-grid kits: Complete off-grid kits are designed specifically for caravans and 4WD systems, providing a turnkey power solution. These kits generally include lithium batteries, inverters, solar solutions and other essential accessories, providing a thorough setup for those eager to venture out into the bush without compromising on creature comforts.

NEW TRENDS

iTechworld’s engineering team has recognised that adventurers are always seeking more robust and efficient power solutions to meet their increasing energy demands. As a result it has developed advanced portable power stations and lithium batteries to cater to these evolving needs.

The iTECH300SS Super Slim battery has a slim profile and substantial 300Ah capacity to provide ample power for extended off-grid adventures. Integrated Bluetooth compatibility allows users to monitor and control their battery’s status in real time via the iTechworld Connect Battery Management app, ensuring optimal performance throughout their journey.

Another product is the iTECH400X PRO battery, which features a prismatic cell type and an advanced Battery Management System (BMS). This design minimises cell degradation and supports high-current use, enabling the operation of high-power appliances through a 3000W inverter.

Looking ahead, iTechworld’s development team is preparing to introduce new products designed to meet even higher power demands for extended off-grid stays.

iTECHWORLD
iTECHWORLD
40A DC-DC CHARGER
iTECHWORLD
OW PRO

iTECHWORLD
3000W PRO PURE SINE WAVE INVERTER

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Convert DC power to AC power with a pure sine wave inverter; Having a good power setup is essential when off-grid camping; Power no matter where you go with the 1800W PRO Portable Lithium Power Station

NEW PRODUCTS

The iTECH160X PRO lithium battery, engineered for high-capacity storage, stands out among the new offerings from iTechworld. This battery provides extended power with 100 per cent usable capacity, ensuring nothing goes to waste. Its lightweight yet powerful design makes it perfect for longer stays in remote areas, where stable energy is essential. The iTECH160X PRO is compatible with other iTechworld products, allowing users to expand their power systems effortlessly.

"Alongside the iTECH160X PRO, we've recently introduced the 1800W PRO Power Station, a versatile solution for users requiring output to support multiple devices at once," Bailey said. "With an output of 1800W, this power station can accommodate a variety of devices, such as laptops, cameras and small appliances.

"If you need a bit more power, you can connect up to two EB1536 Expansion Batteries to your unit for a total capacity of 360Ah. It's the ideal addition for off-grid travellers seeking consistent and reliable power for extended periods, particularly when facing increased energy demands."

For those needing to store food and keep it fresh, iTechworld has expanded its range with the iFROST portable fridge freezers, available in 40L and 95L sizes. These fridge freezers are designed to provide rapid cooling with low power consumption and they pair perfectly with iTechworld's power stations, ensuring fresh food and drinks are with you when you need them.

OPTIMAL OFF-GRID POWER SETUP

For an optimal off-grid power setup, iTechworld offers a range of products that are designed to work seamlessly together. A high-capacity lithium battery is at the heart of any system, providing a stable and long-lasting power source for essential appliances and devices. A Pure Sine Wave inverter is essential to make the most of this stored energy, allowing users to safely run 240V appliances without compromising performance or efficiency.

Keeping the system charged is just as important as using it efficiently. A high-quality DCDC charger ensures the battery remains topped up while driving, while solar panels provide a renewable and reliable energy source for stationary charging, especially when paired with an MPPT solar charge controller. To maintain system health and prevent unexpected power shortages, a battery monitoring system allows real-time energy usage and charge levels tracking, ensuring users stay informed and in control.

iTechworld designs its off-grid power and battery management systems with scalability in mind, allowing customers to adjust and expand their setups to accommodate future upgrades. This flexibility is particularly beneficial for users anticipating increased power needs over time.

> *"iTechworld offers off-grid systems that can be customised* to meet specific power requirements"

iTechworld offers off-grid systems that can be customised to meet specific power requirements. For instance, the 18.43kWh Off-Grid System Elite includes six iTECH240X PRO Lithium Batteries, a 40A MPPT Solar Charge Controller and a 3000W Pure Sine Wave inverter.

If you're looking for portable energy solutions, the PS3600 PRO Portable Lithium Power Station is a great choice. Users can easily expand its capabilities by adding EB3840 Expansion Batteries. Each of these batteries boosts your power with an extra 300Ah (3840Wh) of capacity, and you can connect up to two of them for a huge total of 11,520Wh (900Ah). This flexible, modular approach makes it simple for you to tailor your power system to meet your growing energy needs. The power experts at iTechworld can help you create a customised 12V build that perfectly fits your power needs and budget, making sure your system is ready for any future expansions.

RIGHT AND BELOW A portable generator like the Redback RB4.5 can be a great off-grid companion; iTechworld iTECH160X PRO deep cycle lithium battery and GoFurther Battery Box with integrated iTECHDCDC40 and iTECHBM500 Battery Monitor Shunt

4500 / 3500
STARTING WATTS
RUNNING WATTS
REDBACK
RB4.5EFI

iTECHWORLD
THE POWER EXPERT
iTECH160X PRO
LITHIUM LIFEPO4
12.8V | 160AH | 2048WH
iTECHWORLD
GO FURTHER

INTEGRATION

iTechworld designs its products to integrate seamlessly with its own and third-party solar and battery systems, ensuring flexibility and versatility for customers. For instance, iTechworld lithium power stations can be charged via solar panels, 12V or 240V sources, and they support pass-through charging, allowing them to power devices while simultaneously charging.

While iTechworld recommends using its own solar panels for optimal performance, third-party panels can also be used, provided their specifications align with the power station's charging parameters. It's important to consult the user guide or product details to ensure compatibility.

Some 99 per cent of non-lithium profile chargers are compatible with iTechworld lithium batteries, except for chargers specifically designed for calcium batteries. Non-lithium profile solar controllers and DCDC chargers are compatible, allowing the battery to charge to a 98-100 per cent capacity. Using a non-lithium profile charger won't shorten the lifespan of an iTechworld battery. A charger with a lithium profile should be used; otherwise, AGM and GEL profiles are suitable alternatives.

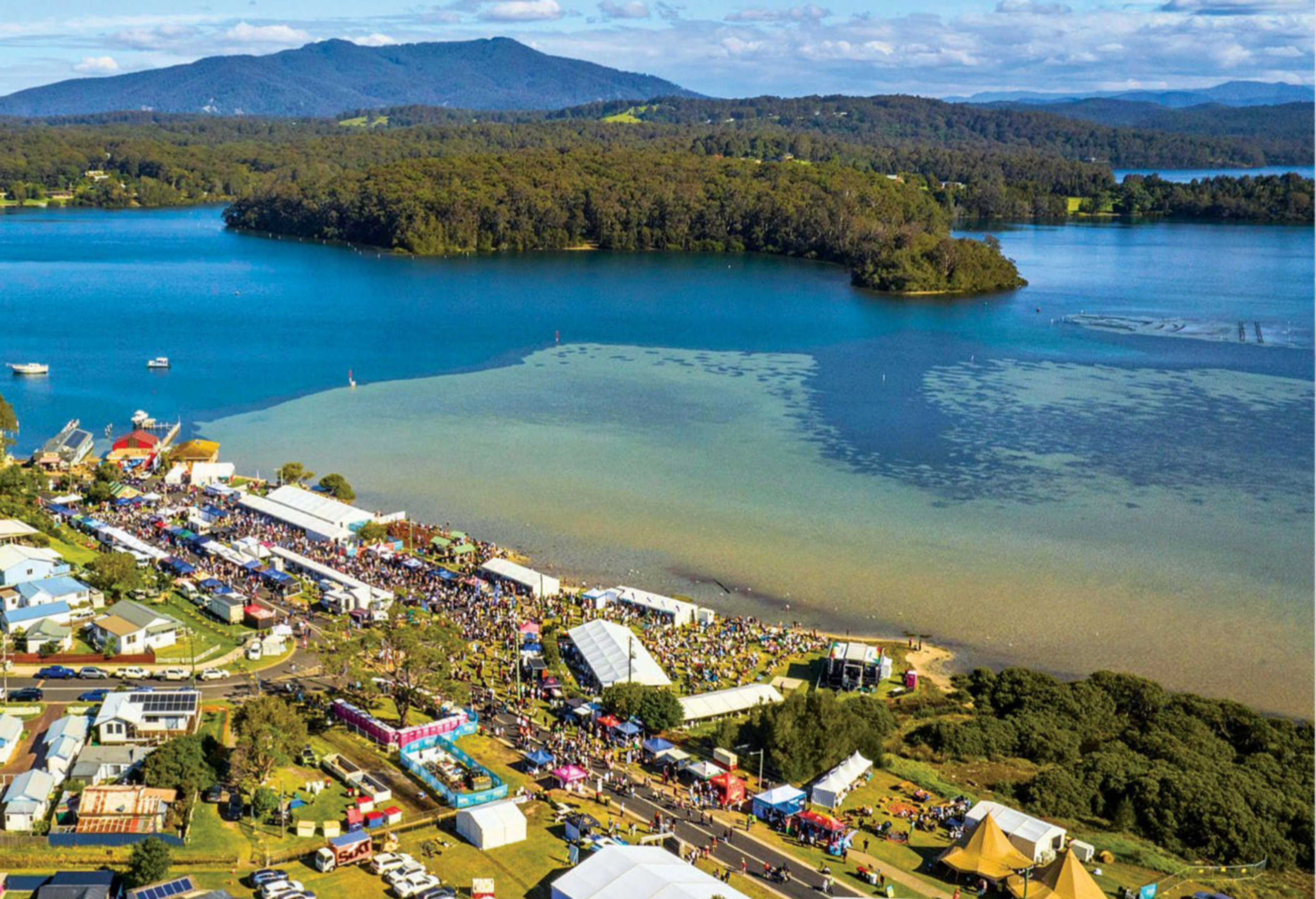
CUSTOMER SUPPORT

iTechworld takes great pride in providing comprehensive customer support and strong warranty coverage to ensure users get the most from its products.

A range of support options include a Help Centre filled with troubleshooting guides, FAQs and manuals to resolve any issues. If customers need more personalised help, they can easily contact the support team, who are experts in power solutions. Whether you need installation help, troubleshooting or advice on optimising your off-grid system, iTechworld's support team is ready to assist.

iTechworld provides a standard product warranty that covers manufacturing defects, giving you peace of mind. In addition, there are extended warranties for lithium batteries. If you encounter any issues during the warranty period, the process for returns or repairs is guaranteed to be easy and hassle-free.

For further information about any of the iTechworld power solutions or to speak to one of the team about your specific needs, head to the website itechworld.com.au



SAVOUR THE NSW SOUTH COAST

Words *Amelia Mansell* **Pics** *Supplied*

Held on the stunning South Coast of New South Wales, the Narooma Oyster Festival celebrates the region's finest rock oysters and their growers, showcasing the unique complexities of merroir alongside delicious food and local produce, cooking demonstrations with local and international chefs, live music and so much more.

Sydney Royal
Narooma Oyster festival
Pambul
Wapengo
Angasi O
cific Oyster
Wallis
Lagoon
Honorbread

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Join one of the festival's Ultimate Oyster Experiences; Watch the experts at the Oyster Shucking Competition (Images David Rogers Photography); Narooma Oyster Festival on Wagonga Inlet

WHAT IS MERROIR?

To truly experience the Narooma Oyster Festival, it's essential to understand merroir. Similar to terroir in wine, merroir describes how an oyster's flavour reflects the conditions of its growing environment. Just as wine is shaped by soil, climate and location, oysters' tastes are influenced by factors like water quality, tides and the surrounding landscape.

The Eurobodalla region on the NSW South Coast is known for its unique microclimates, making its rock oysters highly sought after. Unlike the more common Pacific oyster, the rock oyster's flavour is more complex, with key taste elements: brine, creaminess, sweetness, mineralisation and umami. The balance of these elements defines the oyster's distinctiveness. Brine comes from salinity, creaminess is linked to the oyster's reproductive cycle, sweetness comes from the adductor muscle and mineralisation is influenced by trace minerals in the water. Umami — an elusive savoury taste — resides in the oyster's protein.

The Eurobodalla Coast's unique environmental conditions create oysters with rich, complex merroir. Warm northern waters blend with cold sub-Antarctic currents and runoff from the Snowy Mountains to create an ideal farming environment. Local farmers sometimes start crops in one part of an estuary, or a neighbouring estuary, and finish in another to achieve subtle, distinctive flavours. For example, oysters from Wagonga Inlet tend to have brininess and minerality, while those from Clyde River have a stronger umami taste.

Understanding merroir allows you to appreciate the depth of an oyster's flavour and its connection to the land and water where it was grown.

The 18th annual Narooma Oyster Festival, set against the stunning backdrop of Wagonga Inlet, Narooma, is one of the most anticipated events on the New South Wales food calendar. Running during 2-4 May 2025, the festival is a celebration of the region's rich oyster-growing heritage, with a particular focus on the prized rock oyster, which is unique to this section of the east coast.

This vibrant not-for-profit event brings together oyster farmers, expert chefs, foodies and food lovers from all over Australia and is recognised as one of the largest food and drink festivals in southern NSW. So, if you love delicious fresh oysters, live music, exciting competitions, masterclasses with the experts and an all-around great coastal atmosphere, then the Narooma Oyster Festival is for you.

A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

The Narooma Oyster Festival is truly an oyster lover's paradise, with around 65,000 oysters presented in a variety of ways. For those who love them natural, there's plenty of fresh oysters on offer, but adventurous foodies will enjoy oysters dressed up, grilled or paired with local gin, beer, sauces and, of course, Champagne and Australian sparkling wines. Aside from the local and unique rock oysters which grow wild only in NSW, you can also sample the rich native angasi oyster and the briny Pacific oyster.

Oyster Farmers Alley is a must-visit stop, where you'll get to meet the growers behind these delicious oysters and explore the concept of merroir – the unique taste of place that each oyster reflects. It's a great opportunity to discover the diverse flavours that make the region's oysters so special, as it's one of the few regions where oysters can be harvested and plated directly from the estuaries without the need for depuration. The festival also offers exclusive Ultimate Oyster Experiences, with masterclasses on pairing oysters with French Champagne and, new to 2025, award-winning gins and craft beers.

The excitement doesn't stop there. The Seared & Salty dinner supported by Olsson's Salt and prepared by Terra Firma Dining, along with cooking demonstrations throughout the weekend, showcases how chefs elevate the region's finest produce into extraordinary dishes.

WELCOME
to
the ULTIMATE OYSTER EXPERIENCE
narooma Oyster festival

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE The festival offers Ultimate Oyster Experiences; Oyster Farmers Alley; The Oyster Shucking Competition is a must-see held on Saturday (Images David Rogers Photography)

Australia's Oyster Coast

WHERE TO STAY WITH YOUR VAN

Eurobodalla is a haven for caravanners travelling the east coast and is conveniently positioned on the Princes Highway between Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra.

It's also the heart of NSW's Rock Oyster Country, so an oyster experience or farm gate visit is never far away. You can even pick up excellent whole oysters from some service stations! Think epic beaches, serene estuaries or towering spotted gum forests, perfect for settling in for a longer stay under a billion-star sky.

Murramarang National Park and **South Durras** are local favourites for caravan-friendly accommodation, offering multi-day hikes, a restaurant, a boat ramp and three caravan parks to choose from. Around 20km north of Narooma via the dairy farming village of Bodalla, **Beachcomber Holiday Park** at Potato Point has a long-held reputation for some unusual beach guests ... emus and kangaroos.

Prefer something more rustic? There are plenty of smaller, remote campsites to choose from. **Congo Campground** near Moruya sits within Eurobodalla National Park and has caravan-friendly sites and a boat ramp. **Clyde River National Park** at Batemans Bay has a limited number of sites — **Beach Campground** offers just four tent camping pads and is accessible only by 4WD or boat, while **Red Gum Campground** is an option for camper trailers.

Eurobodalla Shire Council also operates three campgrounds at **Dalmeny**, **Mystery Bay** and Moruya's **North Head**. **Dalmeny Campground,** a few kilometres north of Narooma, offers great beach views and has amenities and cafes nearby. **Mystery Bay Campground**, just south of Narooma, offers unpowered sites, potable water and basic amenities set among gums, banksias and acacias. It's a peaceful retreat, yet only a short drive from Narooma's excellent seafood if the fish aren't biting. North of Narooma, at **Moruya North Head Campground**, campers enjoy both river and beach access, potable water, amenities and even firewood and the legendary weekly Sage Farmers Market where you can grab some freshly harvested oysters and a quick shucking lesson!

For those traveling with pets, check in with the park before booking. And remember, Narooma Oyster Festival does not allow pets.

WORLD-CLASS CHEFS AND LOCAL FLAVOURS

The 2025 Narooma Oyster Festival guest chef lineup is impressive, with the Narooma Betta Home Living Cooking Demonstrations featuring Nornie Bero (Melbourne's Mabu Mabu), Al Brown (Depot Eatery & Oyster Bar, Federal Delicatessen, Best Ugly Bagels), Analiese Gregory (SBS's *A Girl's Guide to Hunting, Fishing and Wild Cooking*) and Narooma's own Al Newbold (Mr Bold) planning restaurant-quality dishes to cook at home. These chefs will join local food producers to create a culinary experience like no other.

The foreshore will come alive with not just food but also arts, the Yuin Cultural Markets, more than 20 distillers, brewers and wine makers, live music and roving performers. It's a celebration of culture, creativity, and, of course, the region's stunning oysters.

ABOVE Champagne Oyster Cruise aboard the *Wagonga Princess* (Image Eurobodalla Tourism)

WHAT'S ON:

A WEEKEND OF FUN AND FLAVOUR

Friday (2 May)

The festivities kick off on Friday evening, starting at 4pm and running until 9pm. There will be live performances by Bek Jensen and Gang of Brothers on the MG Stage, large-scale projections by the Bioluminescence Project, followed by a spectacular fireworks display at 8.30pm. While you immerse yourself in the music, food vendors and festival atmosphere, don't miss trying out the range of bars nearby, offering everything from cooked and natural oysters and bubbles to craft beverages. The festival's seafood chowder is legendary too! And for a true culinary experience, don't miss the Seared & Salty dinner, a waterfront culinary experience hosted by Charly Pretet of Terra Firma Dining and fire pit master Marco, supported by Olssons Salt.

Saturday (3 May)

Saturday is the heart of the festival, with events running from 10am to 5.30pm. This jam-packed day includes menus from South Coast oyster farmers at Oyster Farmers Alley, where you can select oysters from the region's different estuaries and learn how to shuck an oyster yourself. Watch the pros at the Australian Oyster Shucking Championships, where the best shuckers from around the country compete for a spot in the World Oyster Opening Championships in Galway, Ireland, in September. And don't miss Australia's Biggest Oyster competition, featuring oysters of epic proportions – last year's winner set a new world record at 3.1kg!

The festival's cooking demonstrations – supported by Narooma Betta Home Living – will feature some renowned guest chefs, including Al Newbold, Analiese Gregory, Nornie Bero and Al Brown. Alongside these, local food vendors, brewers, distillers and winemakers will be showing off their best produce. Live music will keep the energy up throughout the day and market stalls, street theatre and roving performers keep the festival atmosphere going.

For those seeking premium experiences, Saturday offers special events like the Gin Lovers Masterclass with Rock Oysters, Crafty Brewers Masterclass with Rock Oysters, Champagne and Oyster Masterclass, Champagne Oyster Cruises and the Sydney Royal Ultimate Oyster Experiences.

Sunday (4 May)

To wrap up the festival, grab your picnic blanket and chairs and join the fun at Narooma's Biggest Breakfast event – a relaxed morning with community spirit, great food, freshly shucked oysters and a raffle draw to win an MG ZS Excite. It's the perfect way to round off a weekend of celebrations.

EXPERIENCE ADVENTURE AND CONNECTION IN EUROBODALLA

From mountain peaks to ocean swells, Eurobodalla is an adventure lover's paradise where nature sets the pace, and every day brings a new thrill.

For those who love to bike ride, the world-class trails at Narooma and Mogo are supported by shuttle buses, bike hire companies and an amazing community. If you prefer to explore on foot, then try out the Murramarang South Coast Walk — a multi-day hike with clifftop views, a river crossing, hidden beaches and lush rainforest, or the half-day Gulaga Mountain Walk.

For a deeper connection to Country, join a Yuin Nation Cultural Experience guided tour to learn more about Aboriginal culture, sustainability, agriculture and the Dreaming Stories of the land and sea from Yuin traditional knowledge holders.

Out on the water, Eurobodalla's coastline is a playground. Take on the waves with surfing or kite-surfing lessons or head offshore for a charter fishing trip, where you might reel in a snapper or kingfish while spotting dolphins riding the waves. Between June and November whale watching is unforgettable — whether from a headland lookout, a kayak or a guided cruise, these gentle giants put on a spectacular show.

For an adrenaline rush like no other, skydive over Moruya and take in breathtaking views from above or get up close with lions and meerkats at Mogo Wildlife Park. No matter your adventure style, Eurobodalla promises action, beauty and unforgettable moments.

ABOVE Enjoy live music on the MG Stage on Friday (Image David Rogers Photography)

AUSTRALIA'S BIGGEST OYSTER
2024 Winner

HOW TO SHUCK AN OYSTER

SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO

One of the festival's highlights is the Australian Oyster Shucking Championships, where experts shuck oysters in record time. The record is 30 oysters in two minutes and 39 seconds! Want to try it yourself? Here's a quick guide to get you started and you can scan the QR code above for a handy video guide as well.

What you'll need:

- Rock oysters
- Oyster knife (short, sturdy, pointed tip)
- Thick cloth or glove
- Chopping board

Step 1: Check and store
Fresh oysters should smell like the ocean. Rinse off any grit and discard any open oysters. Store rock oysters in a cool, damp cloth or hessian bag — never in the fridge, on ice or in fresh water or a plastic bag.

Step 2: Get ready
Wear your glove for safety. Find the hinge where the shells meet and place the oyster on a chopping board for stability.

Step 3: Insert the knife
Place the knife at the hinge and gently twist it in until the shell pops open. Use light pressure to avoid cuts to the oyster.

Step 4: Open the oyster
Twist or leverage the knife downwards to open the top shell. Cut the top of the adductor muscle (located around the two o'clock mark) by flattening your blade and sliding it under the top shell and to the right. This will detach it from the top shell.

Step 5: Free the oyster
Slip your knife under the oyster to gently cut the bottom of the adductor muscle and free the oyster from its shell. Flip it over for a nice presentation, an Australian technique!

Step 6: Inspect and serve
Check for any shell fragments or debris. You can rinse them, but enjoying the oyster liquor is part of the experience. If it's a warm day, serve your shucked oysters on ice (ideally eat them within half an hour), or cover and keep them chilled at 2–5 degrees Celsius.

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT The 2024 Australia's Biggest Oyster competition set a new record of 3.1kg; Head to Oyster Farmers Alley for some of the best oysters in Australia; Courtney Roulston cooking demonstration in 2024 (Images David Rogers Photography)

ROCK OYSTER WEEK:
START THE CELEBRATION EARLY

For those who can't wait until the festival weekend, Rock Oyster Week kicks off on 26 April and runs through until 4 May. This extended program is all about showcasing the diversity of the South Coast's oyster-growing regions. Narooma especially is a hub of activity, from e-bike tours with oyster picnics to farm visits by boat and guided tours of the estuaries with South Coast Seaplanes. The fun continues across Eurobodalla and along the coast ... picture yourself kayaking to a fifth-generation oyster farm on the Clyde River with Region X, learning how to shuck oysters with the Womens Australian Oyster Shucking Champion Sue McIntyre, or simply enjoying a nice long lunch in a seaside town – it's the perfect lead-up to the festival. With every freshly shucked oyster, every sip of wine and every conversation with an oyster farmer, Rock Oyster Week is a celebration of place, provenance and the people who bring it to life.

For a more relaxed experience, take a self-guided road trip and enjoy tastings at the region's farm gates throughout the week.

TICKETS AND MORE

Tickets for the festival are now on sale, and for more details on the event – including premium experiences, ticket information and a breakdown of local oyster growers – head to the festival website (naroomaoysterfestival.com). It's your chance to explore the beautiful and diverse NSW South Coast, discover new flavours and immerse yourself in the unique world of oysters.

STEAMED OYSTERS WITH WHEY AND GREEN GARLIC BUTTER

Chef *Analiese Gregory*

Analiese uses the rich, earthy, native angasi oyster in this warming Autumn dish. Rock oysters are an excellent and easily available alternative, with a creamy, salty flavour profile. On the NSW South Coast, the heart of Rock Oyster Country, a farm gate or seafood supplier is never far away.

Ingredients

- 300ml whey or buttermilk
- Finely sliced green garlic
- 200g salted butter, diced and cold
- 2 angasi or rock oysters

Method

1. Place the whey into a small pot and bring to a boil, then reduce down to 1/3 of its original volume. Add the green garlic then whisk in the cubed butter until emulsified. Check the seasoning and keep warm on the side.

2. Bring a pot of water to a simmer under a steamer, shuck the oysters, replacing the lids on them each time. Place the oysters into the steamer and steam gently for 2–3 minutes, or until the oysters have set and are just warm but not fully cooked.

3. Remove the top oyster shells, place them on a plate of salt and spoon the emulsified warm whey butter into each one.

Analiese Gregory is a Michelin star-trained guest chef at the 18th Narooma Oyster Festival's Betta Home Living Cooking Demonstration Program. She explores life at the bottom of the world in *A Girl's Guide to Hunting, Fishing and Wild Cooking* — season two launches in autumn. Her book, *How Wild Things Are*, is a blueprint for how to live, as much as how to cook.

IN BRIEF

- Premium 4500kg ATM couples van equipped for long-term travel
- The luxury fitout and ample off-grid ability will appeal to those travellers who appreciate the extra space and payload to tour in comfort

TITANIUM
Ti S4
TITANIUM

Words and Pics
JOHN FORD

BEACH PARTY

Titanium Caravans' reputation for building rugged offroad caravans keeps growing, and the new 2025 Ti22 S4 226CL promises premium comfort for couples who enjoy four-season travel and adventures.

RIGHT AND BELOW The top-of-the-range S4; Cruisemaster ATX suspension

TITANIUM
Ti S4
TITANIUM
CARAVANS
MADE IN AUSTRA

The hype and excitement around the Titanium Caravan brand continues to roll in from online forums and blogs from happy owners. Along with the digital vibe, dealers like Caravans Coffs Coast have long advocated the brand from its dealership in Coffs Harbour, NSW. The team lives and breathes the offroad caravanning lifestyle, specialising in caravans ready for the hard road.

Our recent visit to the NSW North Coast blessed us with sparkling late summer weather, making it a perfect opportunity to showcase this premium 22ft 6in (6.9m) couples van on the nearby Boambee Beach, which is easy to access for four-wheel driving.

Before we hitched the van, the Caravans Coffs Coast team showed me how the latest branding works across Titanium's model range. From 2025, the Hardcore and ATX names will be replaced with series numbers for the new hybrids and caravans. The overarching brand name is Ti22, the chemical symbol for Titanium and the 22nd element on the periodic table. Titanium is tough and highly valued for high-end equipment, making it a good fit for the brand's theme. But that's enough science.

This latest model range has been simplified to HS1 and HS2 in the hybrids and S1 to S4 in the caravans. The S1-S4 construction is identical, but suspension and off-grid ability are varied. The van on review here is the top-of-the-line S4, which has Cruisemaster ATX airbag suspension and a raft of extras.

MEASURING UP

⊕

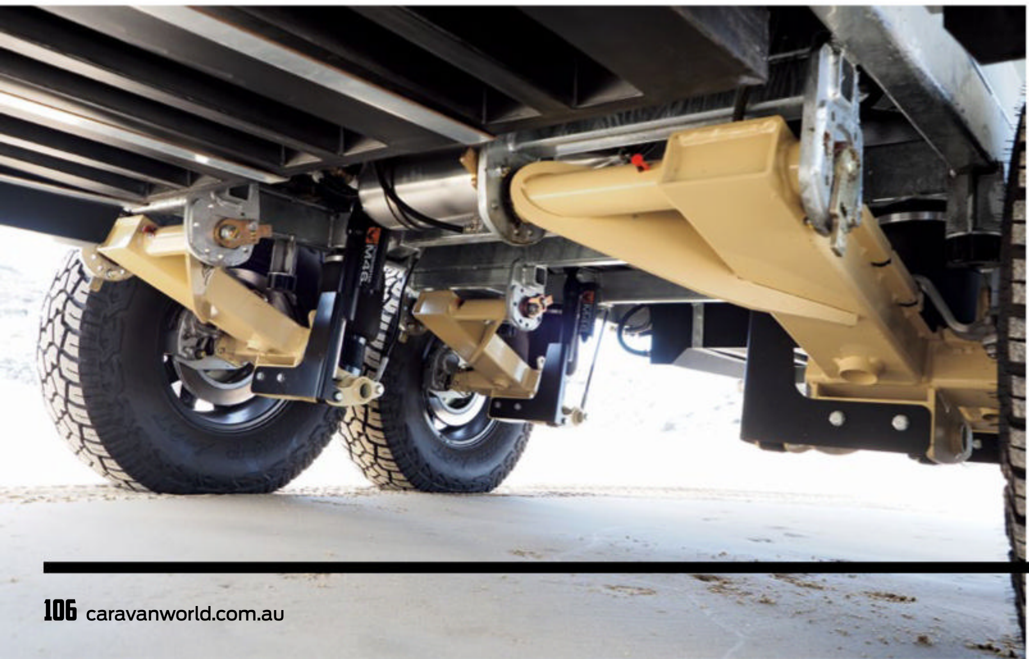
PROS

- Aluminium frame and heavy-duty chassis
- Loads of room for cooking and relaxing
- The giant ensuite has wide appeal

⊖

CONS

- I'd like some separation of the pantry and the loo



A REAL OFFROADER

Boutique builder S&M Chassis supplies the Australian steel chassis, a robust twin 100mm x 50mm (4in x 2in) laminated beam version with an extended and gusseted A-frame. Titanium vans over 21ft in the S4 range are rated to 4.5T with an extra 1000kg payload upgrade as an option, so they are built to deal with challenging travel. Like the Titanium crew, the S&M team are dedicated offroad caravan users, and between the two companies, the vans and chassis go through miles of rugged testing.

Despite many builders moving to a painted chassis, Titanium sticks with a hot-dipped galvanised version for longevity. A weight disadvantage is about 80kg, but rust protection is maximised.

"The overarching brand name is Ti22, *the chemical symbol for Titanium and the 22nd element on the periodic table*"

As a dedicated offroader, the suspension is the premium Cruisemaster 4.5T ATX trailing arm setup with twin shock absorbers and airbags. The Cruisemaster ATX suspension is as good as you will find currently, and it has been proven on thousands of vans and miles. In addition to offering adjustable suspension height for travel, the variable height control allows the van to be levelled on site and the height of the step to be lowered for straightforward entry.

Stopping power comes courtesy of ventilated disc brakes through an electric over hydraulic actuator, and they worked very effectively on our drive. Wheels are Method Race 16in alloys rated to 1632kg and with a lifetime warranty, while the tyres are the excellent Yokohama Geolandar G015 all-terrains, which I also have on my LandCrusier 200 Series and are very grippy and long-lasting.

The S4's body is also built to last. The 25mm C-section alloy frame is machine riveted and interlocked together while insulating XPS foam panels are cut to fill the voids. The frame is made in two sections with a horizontal joint that gives a strategically placed 50mm join to maximise strength for the furniture mixing. It also allows Titanium to include maximum-size windows for improved light and views of the scenery.

The matching faces of the external composite aluminium sheets and frame are sanded before a sealant permanently bonds them together. The top sections of the exterior are a brilliant white, while the lower skirts are flat aluminium coated with X-Guard instead of checkerplate, saving weight and allowing for better repairs of any chips or dents. The internal panels are vinyl-covered ply, which I've been told is a better insulator than fibreglass.

All furniture is CNC-processed lightweight ply, which is glued and screwed to the walls and floor. As many as 200 interlocking joints throughout the joinery create a perfect fit and ensure it handles the rough tracks and corrugations it's bound to endure. The floor is a poly honeycomb sheet with fibre woven through it to add strength and flexibility.

> *“An external hatch to the rear of the passenger side for a 50in television* will create a real party vibe in the footy season”

WHAT’S OUTSIDE?

Upfront, we see a Cruisemaster DO45 hitch and a full-width stoneguard protecting twin 9kg gas bottles. The heavy-duty A-frame was extended by 600mm (1ft 10in) to accommodate a large aluminium toolbox with slide-outs for storage and a Weber barbecue on the passenger side and for a generator on the driver side. The new box features cutouts in the aluminium internals to reduce weight.

Along the passenger side are two tunnel boots that offer excellent storage, a mid-door and an extra-large 1.1m (3ft 6in) picnic table. Also notable on this van is an external hatch to the rear of the passenger side for a 50in television, which will create a real party vibe in the footy season. And down the back, Titanium’s new Wolf Fabrications rear bar looks a treat and has a handy drawer incorporated for often-used items like hoses and chocks. A twin fan dust reduction system is also a standard item on all S4 models.

The review van includes several non-standard features from Wolf Fabrications, a sister company to Titanium. These include powder-coated aluminium extrusions at the roof edges instead of plastic J-moulds and an alloy spoiler at the back. The larger aluminium edge cover creates a purposeful impression, and the spoiler was designed to accommodate more solar panels.

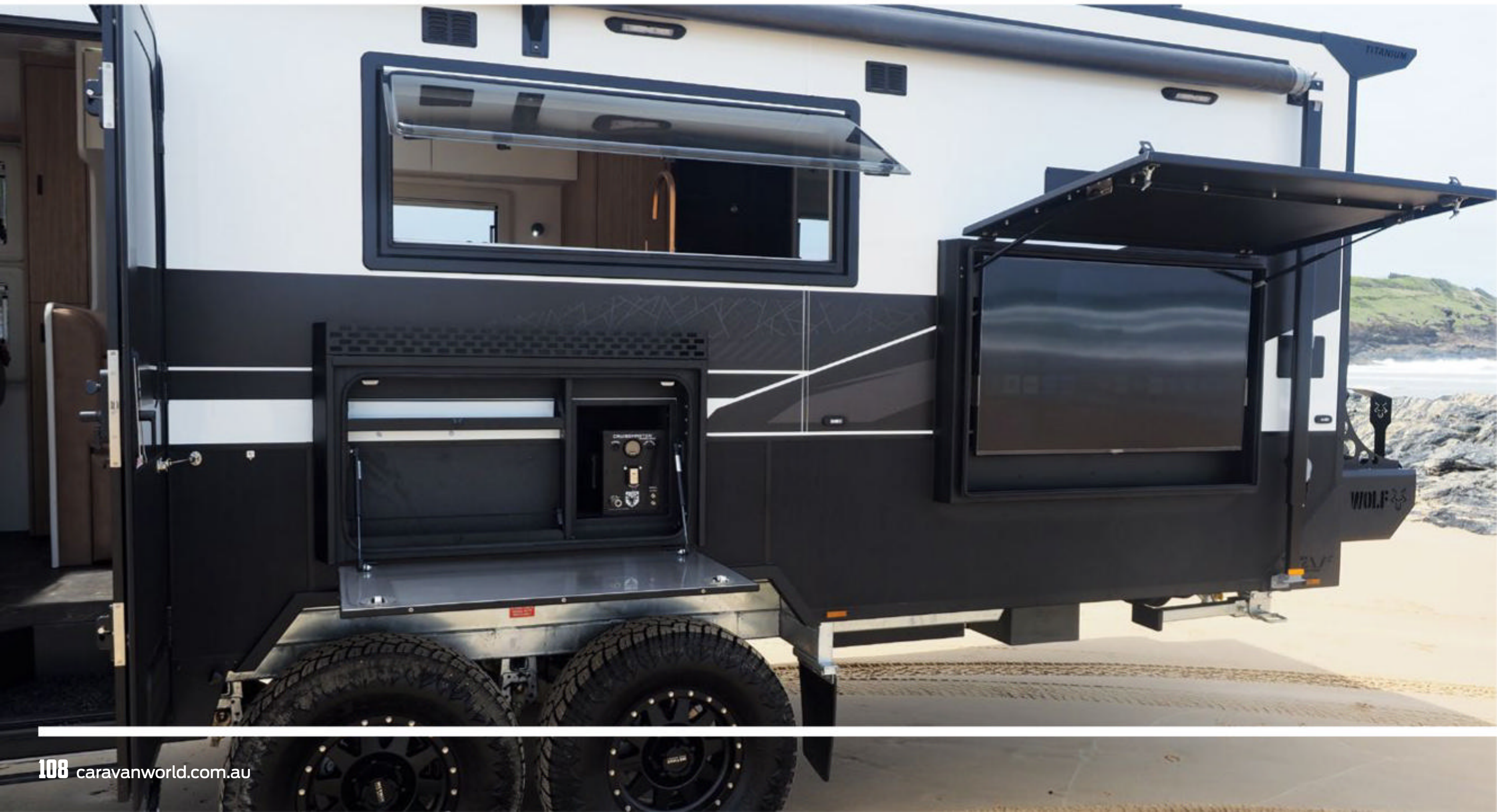
ROOM TO MOVE

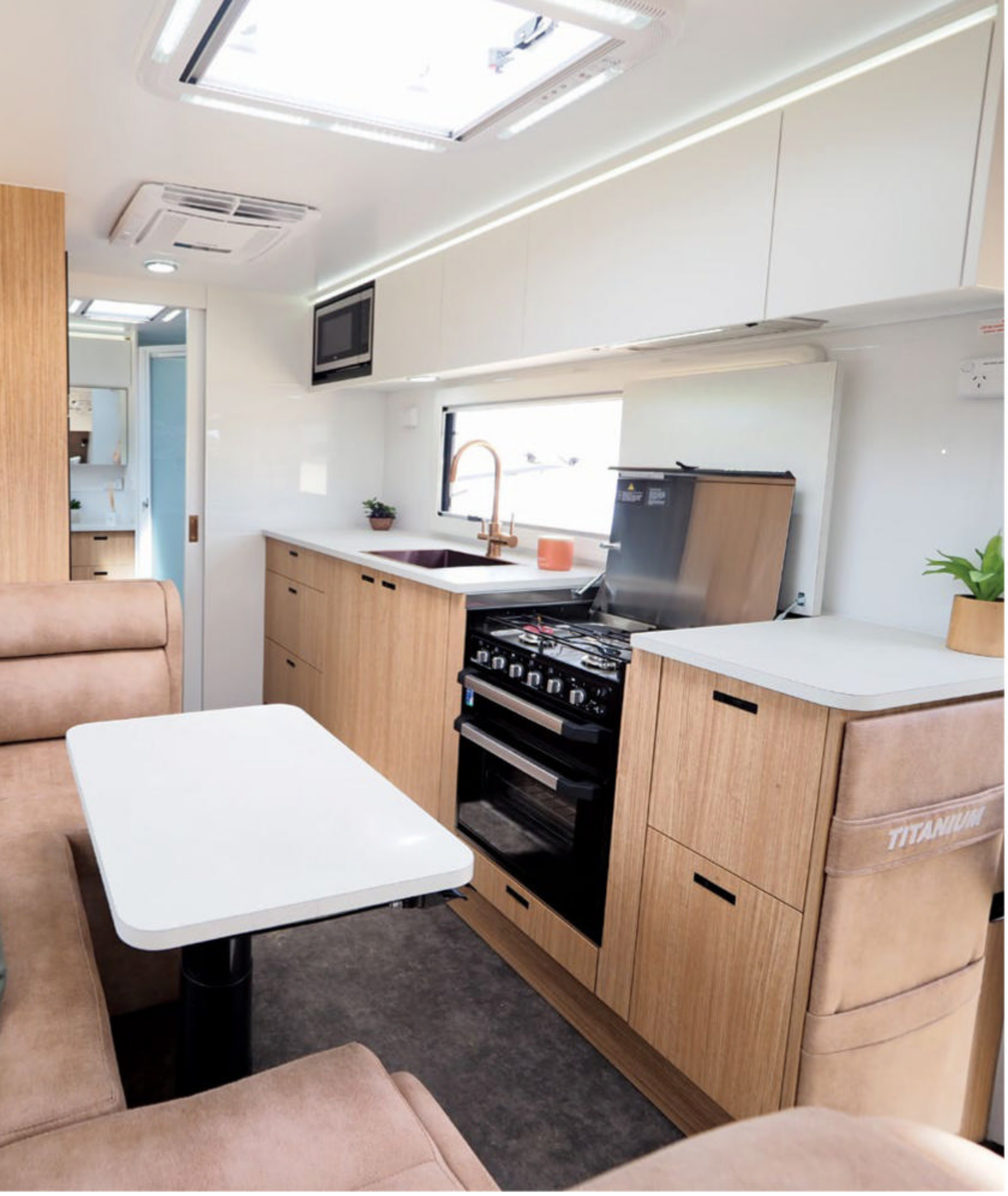
You might guess from the 226CL identifier that the van is large for a couples offroader and yes there is 22ft 6in of upmarket interior. The mid-entry places the large bed near the door, which may not be everyone’s preferred layout, but we will return to that.

Internal colours are warm and inviting, and the furniture has an uncluttered modern appeal highlighted by large white and light timber areas. Hidden cupboard catches and minimal drawer handles bring a Scandinavian style that should appeal for years to come.

Appliances are a mix of gas and electric, which makes sense because gas is more efficient for cooking and heating and is available during rainy weather if the solar supply is low. We saw loads of overhead storage, a long preparation bench with an oven and cooktop, a high microwave and a 224L Dometic compressor fridge. Options for replacing the oven include an induction cooktop and choices of a dishwasher or storage for an air fryer or Thermomix.

The club lounge is beautifully upholstered in leather-look Eastwood Fawn fabric from Warwick Fabrics, and the large table drops to make an occasional bed. Large windows afford wide views and fresh air flow, and there’s enough battery power to run the efficient Dometic FreshJet 7 Series Plus air-conditioner for hours. I’m told the crew accidentally left





WEBER NOT INCLUDED

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Slide-out storage for a Weber barbecue; The exterior hatch for a 50in TV; Beautiful Scandinavian interior

the air-conditioner running on a Friday afternoon, and it ran without the fridge or lights all weekend and still had 78 per cent power when they arrived for work the following Monday.

Down the back is a large ensuite that endears the S4 226CL to many buyers because it's massive – big enough to double as a butler's pantry. To the right as you walk in is an OGO compositing toilet, while an angled oversized shower takes up the rear passenger-side corner. This leaves the driver-side section for a vanity along the back wall and a long bench along the side for appliances like a bread maker, coffee machine or air fryer. Taps, sink and hardware are slick-looking brushed copper items that add a unique look.

And back to the front door near the bed. When Eric from Caravans Coffs Coast took me through the van, he agreed that many buyers wouldn't look at a van or even stick their heads in if the door was beside the bed. But when they see this bathroom, they tell him they love it so much that you could have the door on the roof, and they wouldn't care.

TITANIUM
T122 S4 226CL

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 6.9m (22ft 6in)
Overall length 9.5m (31ft 2in)
Width (inc. awning) 2.46m (8ft)
Travel height 3.2m (10ft 5in)
Internal height 2m (6ft 6in)
Tare 3311kg
ATM 4500kg
Payload 1189kg (calculated)
Ball weight at tare 192kg
Ball to tare ratio 5.8% (calculated)

EXTERNAL

Frame Aluminium
Cladding Aluminium composite cladding, full composite one-piece sandwich panel fibreglass roof
Chassis Hot-dipped galvanised Australian RHS steel
Suspension Cruisemaster ATX airbag 4.5T
Coupling Cruisemaster DO45
Brakes Cruisemaster ventilated disc brakes
Wheels 16in alloy Method Race rims and Yokohama Geolandar G015 AT 285/75 R16 tyres
Water 2 x 160L freshwater, 1 x 85L grey water
Battery 2 x 300Ah lithium batteries
Inverter 3000W Victron (2600W standard)
Solar 6 x 200W, with 2 x 50A MPPT solar regulators (5 x 200W standard)
Air-conditioner Dometic FreshJet 7 Series Plus
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control N/A

INTERNAL

Cooking Three gas and one electric cooktop, grill and oven
Fridge Dometic 224L compressor fridge/freezer
Microwave Flatbed
Bathroom Full ensuite with OGO composting toilet and large one-piece fibreglass shower
Washing machine 3kg front loader wall mounted
Hot water 28L stainless steel gas/electric

PRICE FROM $194,990

OPTIONS FITTED

- Titanium premium external TV box and 50in TV
- Upgraded premium aluminium trim pack and Wolf Fabrications rear spoiler
- Titanium Premium 1100mm outdoor picnic table
- Upgrade to 3000W inverter
- Extra 200W solar panel
- 2 x 50A MPPT chargers
- Upgrade to OGO composite toilet
- 75L additional fresh water
- Upgraded ABI Interiors copper hardware

PRICE AS SHOWN $209,260

MORE INFORMATION

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Coffs Harbour NSW 2450
P: 02 6652 5523
E: sales@caravanscoffscoast.com.au
W: caravanscoffscoast.com.au

> “The stock S4 electronics package runs twin 300Ah lithium batteries, *1000W of solar and a 2600W inverter charged through an Enerdrive system*”

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
Considering the build quality and size, it’s good value in today’s market

TOWABILITY
Smooth towing. Needs a vehicle capable of towing the 4500kg ATM

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
Great for a couple who appreciates the extra room and amenities

BUILD QUALITY
Engineered and built for offroad travel, with fine attention to detail

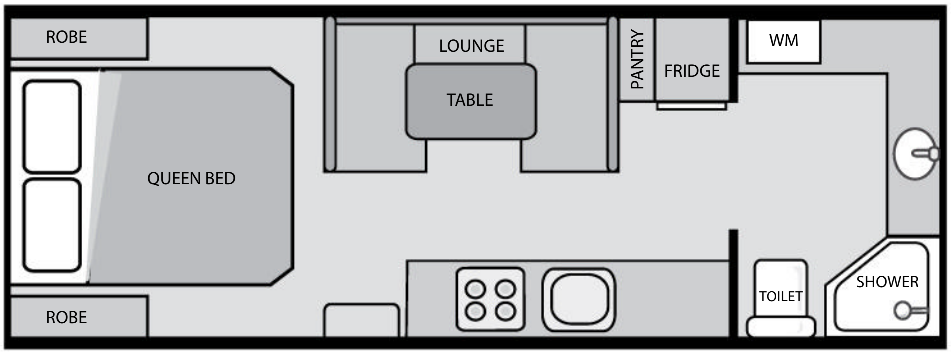
LIVEABILITY
Room to move and entertain with practical indoor/outdoor living spaces

SELF-SUFFICIENCY
Plenty of battery power and water and a composting toilet

CUSTOMER CARE
Caravans Coffs Coast is the real deal when it comes to looking after clients

INNOVATION
Titanium is always looking for an edge. There is a new TV box, front storage and rear bar

X-FACTOR
Plenty of wow factor and brand recognition



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Plenty of benchspace and cupboards in the kitchen; Storage for appliances such as air-fryers next to the fridge; Front bed just inside the entry door

OFF GRID IN STYLE

The stock S4 electronics package runs twin 300Ah lithium batteries, 1000W of solar and a 2600W inverter charged through an Enerdrive system, but the review van had upgrades, including a 3000W inverter, an extra 200W of solar and two 50A MPPT chargers. As we have seen, that is ample for extended air-conditioner use and will happily run cooking appliances. Titanium locates the system in the space behind the fridge with an external hatch for access, while the batteries are in a sealed section under the lounge. Titanium has its own in-house electrician and plumber, and the installation is top-class.

The twin 160L freshwater tanks and an 85L grey water tank are made of 6mm roto-moulded plastic, which is highly durable and resistant to stone damage. They have sumps to ensure complete drainage, allowing the grey water tank to have no bypass, as the team believes it's best to flush it regularly to avoid contamination.

EMBRACE THE LOUD

Our tow vehicle for the review was Caravan Coffs Coast owner Andy's new RAM 1500 TRX with 6.2L of supercharged petrol V8 grunt. Before you complain that the vehicle isn't rated to tow 4.5T, rest assured the S4's tare weight is 3311kg, so it was perfectly legal without any weight aboard. The big van towed perfectly without jerking or vibrations through the GEN-Y torsion hitch. With the power came the roar of the exhaust, but it was muffled enough to be pleasant to a petrol head's ears. The S4 226CL is rated to 4500kg, so you will need a heavy-duty tow rig when the van is at its travelling weight, so you have to factor in something in the range of a 2500 RAM or maybe the new Ford Ranger Super Duty when it comes online in 2026.

ABOVE AND BELOW The spacious rear bathroom doubles as a butler's pantry; The S4 224CL is ideal for couples who enjoy travelling all year round

> *"The spacious layout and extensive storage options* gives owners ample room to spread out"

THE WRAP

Pricing starts at $194,990, and with options like the special external TV box, OGO composting toilet and ABI Interiors copper hardware, it retails at $209,260, which is competitive in today's market for a sizeable well-equipped van. Titanium vans have a five-year structural warranty on the chassis, suspension, furniture structure and frame and two years on the rest of the van, while Caravans Coffs Coast has an enviable reputation for looking after customers.

The S4 226CL is targeted at couples spending extended time on board. The spacious layout and extensive storage options gives owners ample room to spread out and bring whatever they need for four-season travel and adventures.

TITANIUM
TI S4

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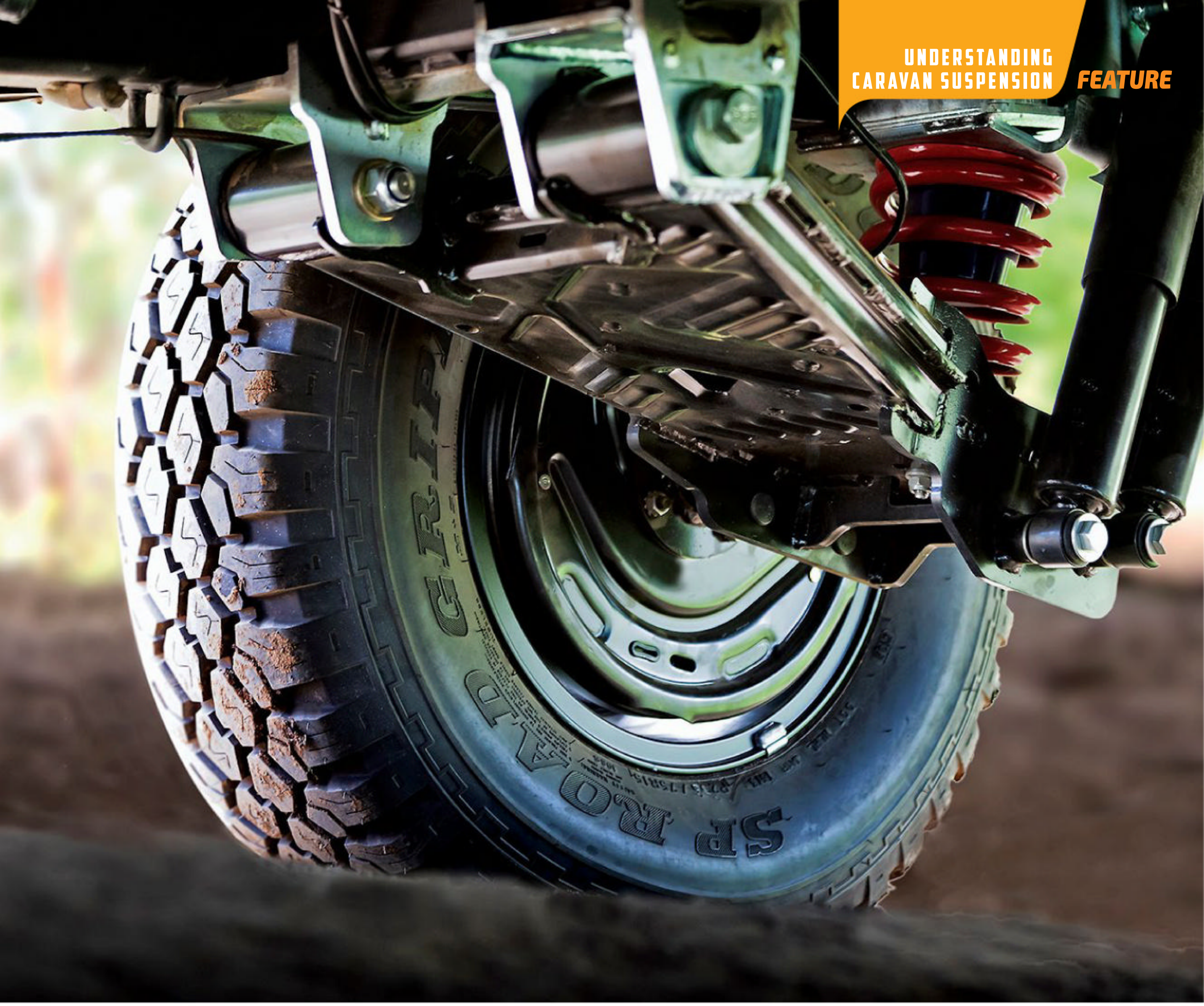
The Narooma Oyster Festival runs May 2 through to May 4 but Rock Oyster Week begins on April 26, so join us a little earlier as we gather for Australia's iconic oyster shellabration!

ABOVE Cruisemaster suspension at work in the outback

UNDERSTANDING CARAVAN SUSPENSION

Caravans would be difficult to control without an effective suspension system to smooth out the forces from bumps and holes in the road. John Hughes takes a look at the pros and cons of various types of caravan suspension systems. ***Words*** *John Hughes* ***Pics*** *John Hughes and Supplied*



ABOVE AL-KO Independent Rubber Suspension (IRS) system is one of the most widely used torsion suspension systems

The suspension system in your caravan plays a vital role in how it handles various road conditions. Suspension smooths out the forces imparted on the caravan by bumps and holes in the road.

This is achieved with two critical components – springs and dampers (usually referred to as shock absorbers). Springs compress to soak up forces. Caravan suspension springs generally come in three different types. Coil springs, leaf springs and airbags – more detail on these later.

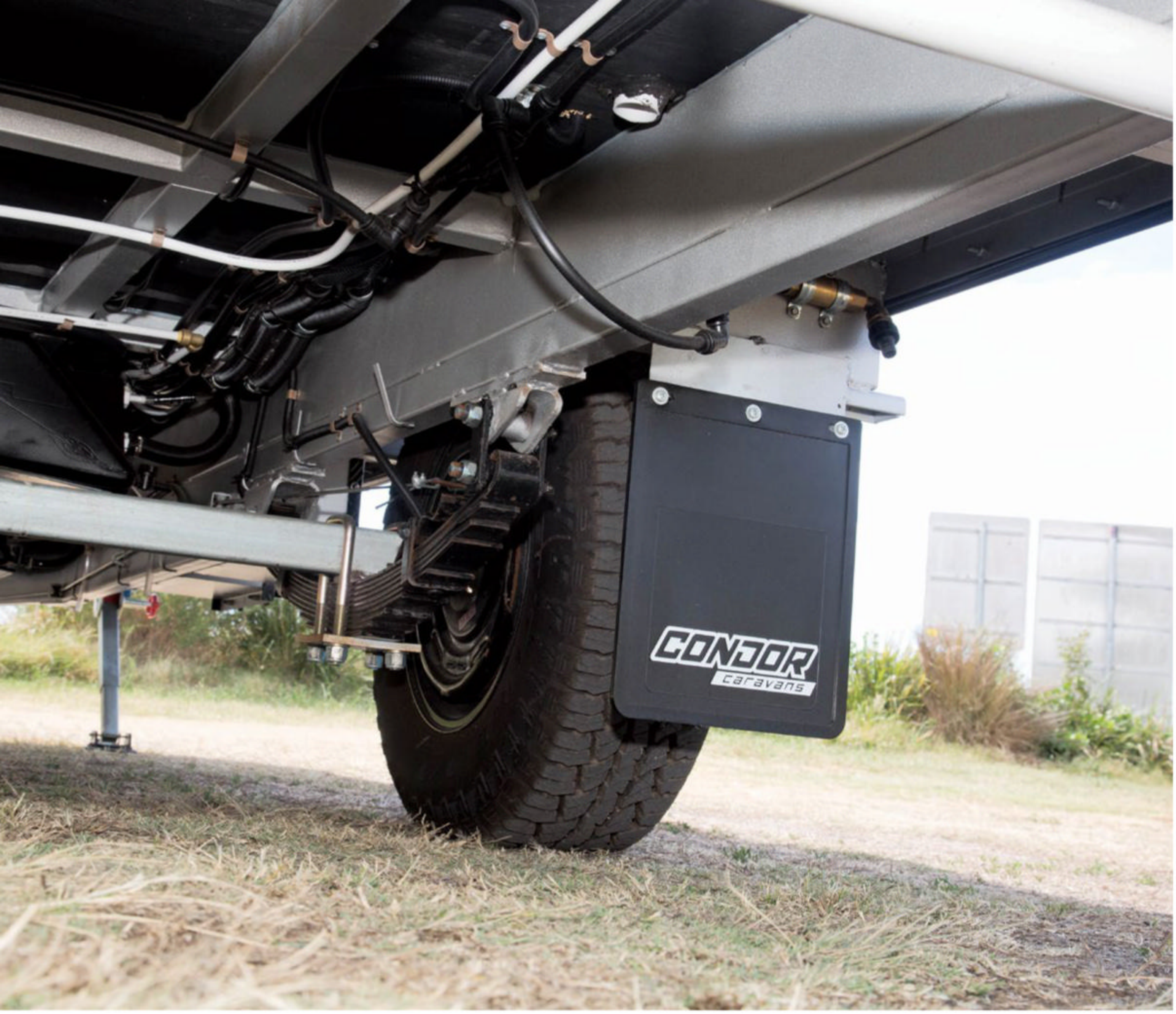
Dampers slow down the spring as it returns from its compressed state. This is a critical function otherwise your caravan would bounce up and down uncontrollably. Little box trailers with leaf springs usually don't have shock absorbers and it is not unusual to feel and hear them bounce significantly, particularly when empty. Dampers vary less in their construction compared to springs. The vast majority of shock absorbers involve some form of cylinder with valving containing compressible fluid to control the rebound of the spring.

Another way of looking at is to say the suspension system works to keep the wheels moving up and down in response to variations in the road while minimising how much the van body moves up and down. Without an effective suspension system, a caravan would be difficult to control, leading to instability and increased wear on the structure and internal components.

The suspension directly affects the safety and longevity of both the caravan and its internal components. A well-designed suspension system reduces impacts and vibrations, preventing excessive stress on the chassis and fixtures inside the caravan. Without adequate suspension, rough roads can lead to structural fatigue, causing cracks in cabinetry, appliances and even the caravan's frame over time. This is why selecting the correct suspension system is critical for different styles of travel, from highway cruising to extreme offroad adventures.

A variety of suspension types have been developed over time. Each type offers different advantages depending on the intended use of the caravan. Some systems are simple and robust, designed for on-road travel, while others provide greater articulation and flexibility for offroad adventures. The right suspension system improves towing dynamics and reduces sway which is essential for maintaining control at higher speeds and in adverse weather conditions.

In this article we provide an overview of the most commonly used suspension types used in caravans today along with some of the lesser-known systems too.



ABOVE AL-KO leaf spring suspension

> "Leaf springs are known for their simplicity, durability, cost-effectiveness and relatively lightweight compared to other systems. *However, they do have limitations*"

LEAF SPRING SUSPENSION

Leaf spring suspension is one of the oldest and traditionally most widely used suspension systems for caravans. It consists of several layers of steel strips (leaves) stacked together and mounted to the chassis using fixed hangers at one end and shackles at the other. The caravan's axle is attached to the centre of the leaf pack. As the wheels encounter bumps, the leaf springs flex and absorb the impact, and then return to their original shape.

Leaf spring suspension is a solid axle system, where the axle runs the full width of the caravan with a wheel attached on each side. This means when a wheel on one side of the axle encounters a bump, the force is partially transferred to the other wheel. This means the system copes with loads but less well with uneven ground.

Leaf springs are known for their simplicity, durability, cost-effectiveness and relatively lightweight compared to other systems. However, they do have limitations. The ride can be harsh, especially on rough terrain, because the multiple layers of steel create friction as they move. As the axle spans the full width of the caravan it reduces ground clearance, compared to independent suspension systems. However, in many tow rigs, the lowest point still could be the rear differential of the tow vehicle.

Leaf spring suspensions offer less refined wheel alignment adjustment than other systems as the axle is bolted into place with U-clamps. Unlike independent suspension systems, there is no straightforward way to adjust toe or camber angles.

Some variations, like Simplicity suspension, improve upon traditional leaf springs by using load-sharing rocker arms that distribute weight between tandem axles more effectively. These systems enhance ride quality and reduce stress on individual components, making them a more refined option within the leaf spring category.

ABOVE AND BELOW Cruisemaster ATX suspension; TerraGlide semi-trailing arm independent suspension by Premcar

TRAILING ARM INDEPENDENT SUSPENSION

Trailing arm independent suspension has been the golden child of the caravan industry for the past decade or so. It offers greater control and comfort by allowing each wheel to move independently. The system consists of trailing arms that extend backward from a chassis-mounted pivot point. A coil spring or airbag supports the weight, while a shock absorber controls movement. As each wheel moves independently, one side of the caravan can absorb bumps without directly affecting the other, resulting in a smoother ride and better traction on uneven terrain.

Independent suspension provides several advantages over leaf spring systems. By eliminating the solid axle, it improves ground clearance and reduces unsprung weight, allowing the caravan to handle rough tracks more effectively. Wheel alignment is more sophisticated where some systems are designed to allow simple toe and camber adjustment.

Even though unsprung weight is reduced, the overall weight of trailing arm systems is often heavier than equivalent leaf spring systems, increasing the tare weight of the van. The increased number of moving parts makes trailing arm systems more complex, expensive and require more maintenance over time.

Coil springs are the default lower-cost solution while airbags are the favourite when it comes to independent suspension. Airbags allow for dynamic ride height adjustments based on load and terrain conditions. This means caravan owners can raise or lower the suspension to suit specific environments – lowering for improved aerodynamics and fuel efficiency on highways or increasing ride height for extra ground clearance when tackling rough tracks. Another benefit of airbags is the ability to raise or lower airbags independently to level the van when parked at camp.

Cruisemaster and AL-KO are among the well-known trailing arm independent suspension providers to the RV industry with both players offering different levels of performance suited to various travel needs.

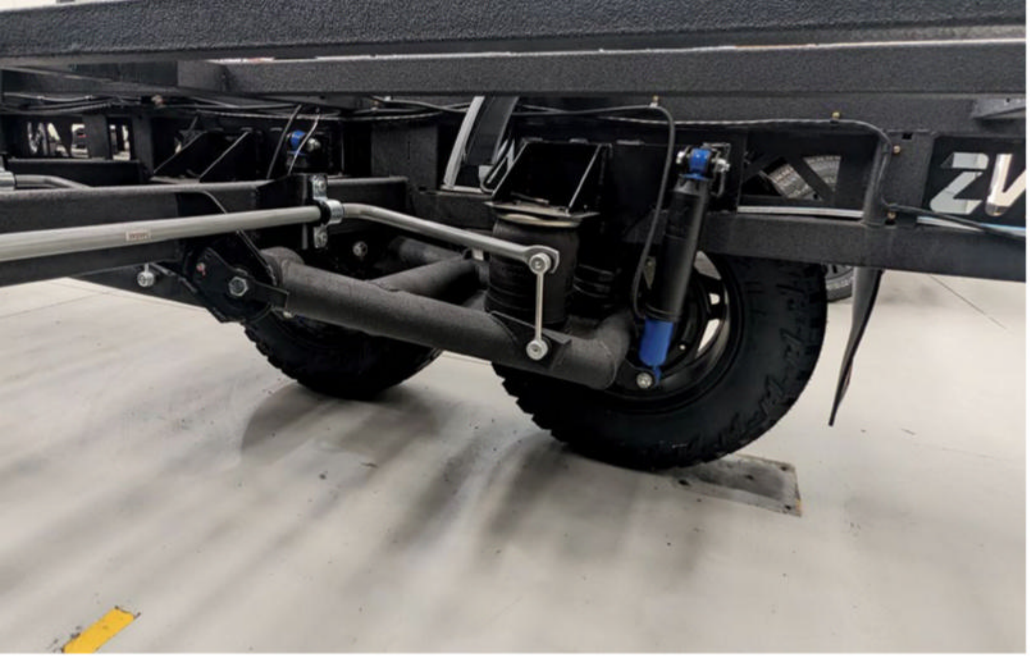
The Cruisemaster CRS (Country Road Suspension) is specifically engineered for touring caravans that primarily travel on sealed roads and light gravel tracks. It provides a significant improvement over leaf spring suspension in terms of comfort and control, thanks to its coil springs and tuned shock absorbers. It is the lightest weight and most cost-effective solution in the Cruisemaster lineup.

For those requiring more rugged capabilities, the Cruisemaster XT offers reinforced trailing arms, heavy-duty coil springs and upgraded dampers to handle more challenging conditions. Designed for serious offroaders, the XT provides increased suspension travel and shock absorption, allowing caravans to maintain traction and stability over corrugated roads, rocky trails and sand tracks. It is heavier and more costly than the CRS system, however. It has proven its durability for more than a decade and has been under countless vans that *Caravan World* has taken to remote places. It is undoubtedly the most well-known of the Cruisemaster systems.

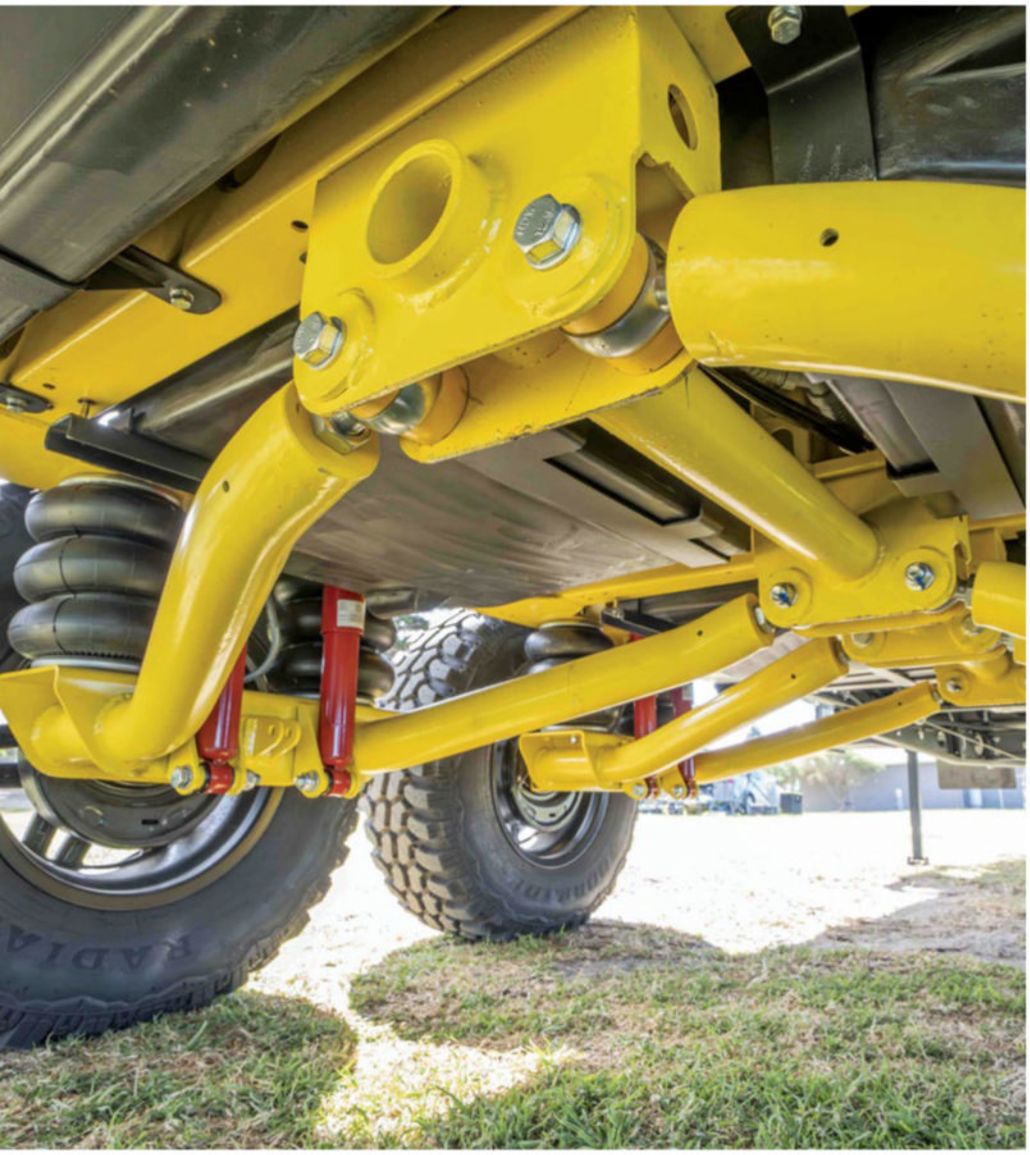
At the top of the Cruisemaster lineup, the ATX is designed for extreme conditions. It features the most robust components and the longest wheel travel. The remote reservoir shocks which provide more shock oil and greater cooling capacity differentiate it from the XT making it best equipped for extended corrugated road travel.

The AL-KO offer is known as the Enduro series. The Enduro Cross Country is designed for semi-offroad use, making it a suitable option for travellers who frequently encounter unsealed roads but do not need extreme articulation. With coil springs and tuned dampers, the Enduro Cross Country provides a balance of comfort and resilience, absorbing shocks effectively while maintaining a straightforward design for easy maintenance.

For offroad enthusiasts who seek maximum durability, the Enduro X delivers high performance on rough terrain. Engineered with heavy-duty components and extended suspension travel, this system is designed to remain stable and controlled on rocky tracks, deep ruts, and washouts. The Enduro X is differentiated from other players by its 'clamshell' trailing arm. It is constructed from two pressed steel sections welded together to make it significantly lighter than traditional trailing arms while maintaining strength. Another key attribute is the forged bolt-on stub axles. Forging optimises strength and bolt-on makes it easy to replace if it breaks.



> *"The AL-KO Independent Rubber Suspension (IRS) system* is one of the most widely used torsion suspension systems"



ABOVE AND BELOW TerraGlide semi-trailing arm independent suspension with anti-roll bar at each arm; Wishbone suspension with airbags on an On The Move Caravans van

SEMI-TRAILING ARM INDEPENDENT SUSPENSION

Semi-trailing arm suspension is a variation of independent suspension where the arms that connect the wheels to the chassis extend diagonally rather than straight back. It is designed to improve wheel geometry, helping to maintain proper tyre alignment and reducing excessive wear. It provides a balance between ride comfort and offroad capability, arguably offering better stability and control than traditional trailing arm setups.

The TerraGlide suspension by Premcar is an advancement of semi-trailing arm suspension in the caravan industry. This system is designed to provide improved handling, particularly in offroad conditions where greater articulation is necessary. The diagonal positioning of the arms provides a balance between the suspension responding smoothly to undulations in the terrain while maintaining strong lateral stability. Coil spring and airbag options are available.

Proponents of semi-trailing arm suspension espouse its ability to maintain more consistent tyre contact with the road surface, reducing excessive camber changes that can lead to uneven tyre wear. Additionally, it is claimed to offer improved load-sharing capabilities compared to traditional trailing arm designs, distributing forces more evenly across both axles in dual-axle setups. Semi-trailing arm setups are similar to trailing arm suspension systems in a number of ways. They are wheel alignment friendly, and they are generally heavier, more expensive and complex than leaf spring systems.

WISHBONE SUSPENSION

Wishbone suspension is similar to that used in many performance cars. It uses wishbone-shaped arms to connect the wheels to the chassis, allowing for independent wheel movement. The arms pivot out to the sides of the caravan rather than to the rear or on an angle as described in the systems above. This design is claimed to allow for precise control over camber angles, improving tyre contact with the road and enhancing handling characteristics. Wishbone suspension also enjoys the benefits of good wheel alignment adjustability.

Users of wishbone suspension include On The Move Caravans which has adopted a very robust iteration for its vans.

As with other independent suspension systems, airbags are a high-end choice to raise and lower the wishbone system and adjust for varying loads. Wishbone systems are also more complex and require higher maintenance compared to simpler systems like leaf springs or torsion axles.

ABOVE AL-KO torsion IRS keeps the van low to the ground while still providing moderate articulation

TORSION SUSPENSION

Torsion suspension is a unique system that eliminates the need for external springs by using rubber inserts within a tubular axle. When the wheel moves up, the internal bar twists against the rubber elements, absorbing the impact from forces imparted by road variation.

The AL-KO Independent Rubber Suspension (IRS) system is one of the most widely used torsion suspension systems. It provides a smooth and controlled ride on sealed and light gravel roads while requiring minimal maintenance due to its sealed design. Unlike coil springs and trailing arm suspensions, torsion suspension does not have multiple moving parts. It is a lightweight, cost-effective, simple and durable solution in many cases.

One of the primary advantages of torsion suspension is its progressive spring rate, meaning that as the suspension compresses, it becomes stiffer. This provides a smoother ride over minor bumps while also allowing the system to handle larger impacts effectively. However, one downside is that torsion axles have limited wheel articulation, making them less suitable for extreme offroad conditions where independent wheel movement is required.

Torsion suspension does not allow for easy wheel alignment adjustments. As the axle is fixed to the chassis, any misalignment must be corrected through external modifications, such as shims or adjustable mounting brackets. This makes it a low-maintenance but less flexible option compared to adjustable trailing arm and wishbone suspensionsystems.

Despite these limitations, torsion suspension is an excellent choice for touring caravans that primarily travel on highways and well-maintained gravel roads. It provides a stable, predictable ride with minimal maintenance requirements, making it particularly appealing to caravan owners who prioritise reliability and simplicity.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Tough Dog 4WD Suspension has branched out into caravan-specific suspension setups; Cruisemaster XT suspension with coil springs; Good suspension is essential when travelling on rough, corrugated roads, especially when towing a caravan

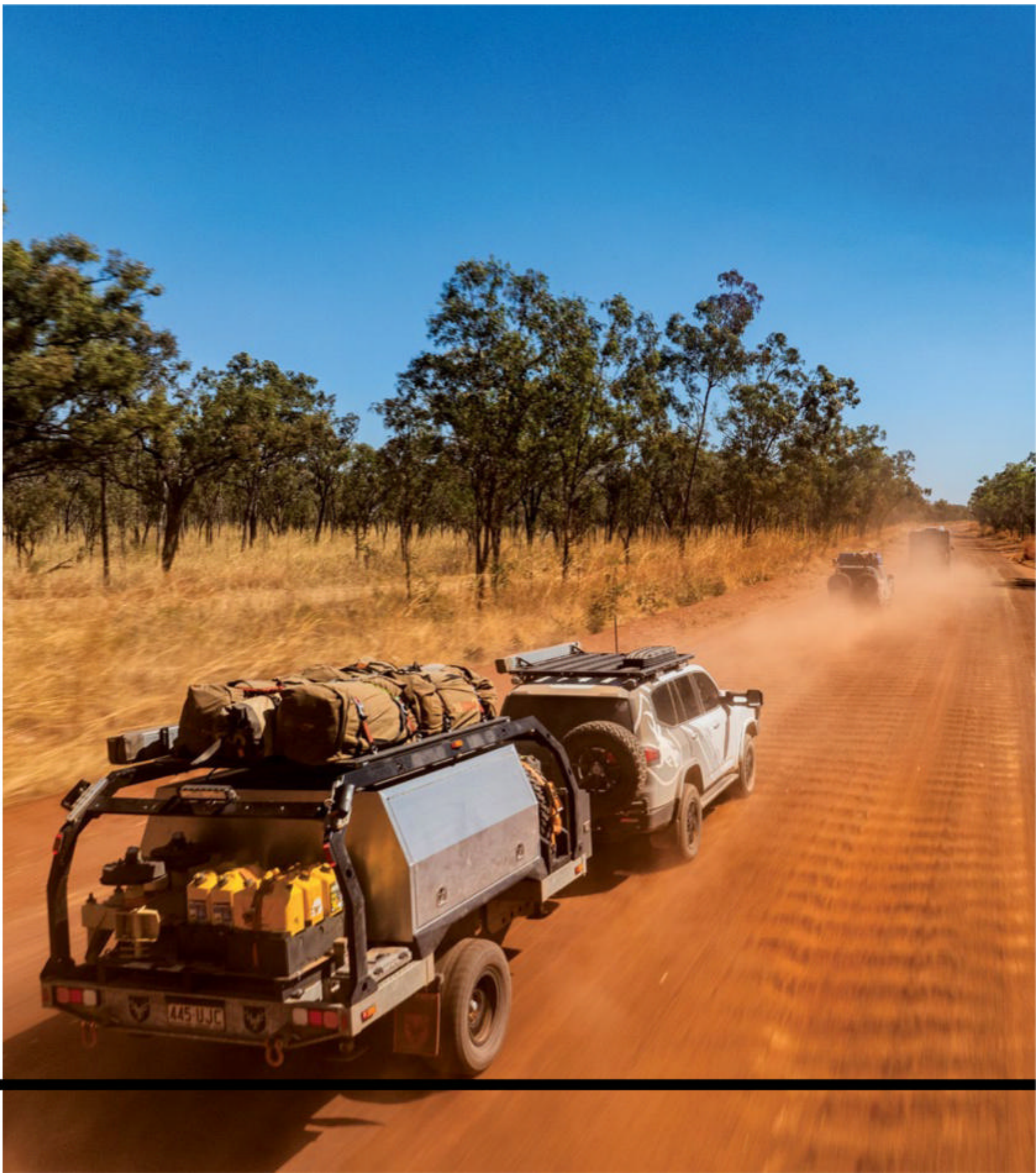
SUSPENSION AND SHOCK SPECIALISTS

We have seen suspension systems rely heavily on quality springs and shock absorbers to perform optimally, and Tough Dog 4WD Suspension has become a well-known name in this space. Originally a 4WD suspension specialist, Tough Dog has expanded into the caravan market, developing tailored shock absorbers and spring solutions for various types of caravan suspensions.

It works with Australian caravan manufacturers to develop shock and spring configurations to suit Australian conditions. Its coil springs are engineered to handle heavy loads while maintaining flexibility, which is crucial for maintaining ride comfort and wheel articulation in independent suspension systems. Its shock absorbers are exposed to extensive field and lab testing to prove their suitability for a given application.

HOW TO CHOOSE THE RIGHT SYSTEM

Choosing the right suspension system for a caravan depends on the intended use and travel conditions. There are a variety of independent suspensions using pivoting systems to enable individual wheel articulation. These independent systems are generally higher performance, more complex and expensive than other systems. Torsion suspension provides a simple, low-maintenance solution for highway and light off-road travel. And leaf spring suspension is the reliable grandfather of the caravan industry. Each has its place, and it is worth understanding the differences to make an informed decision for your next caravan.



> “Choosing the right suspension system for a caravan *depends on the intended use and travel condition*”

VISIT COWRA
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Discover What It Means To Escape...

ABOVE AND RIGHT The Swag SCT16 at Fitzroy River Reserve campsite, Victoria; Built by Aussies for Aussies

A NEW WAY TO SWAG IT

For those looking to experience the heart of this stunning country, whether it's on a laid-back coastal road trip, an off-grid journey or a more adventurous offroad trek, a reliable and well-designed caravan is essential. Enter SWAG Off-Road Campers, a brand born from a passion for outdoor exploration and a commitment to quality that meets the needs of Aussie travellers.

Words Robert Crack Pics Supplied

Founded in 2008 by Kerry Stacey and based in Queensland, SWAG Off-Road Campers is a family owned and operated manufacturer focused on crafting high-quality swags and tents. Kerry's vision was simple: to create products that would enable people to experience Australia's natural beauty without sacrificing comfort.

As Australia's RV and camper trailer market evolved, particularly with the influx of imported products in the mid-2010s, SWAG shifted focus and branched out into a full range of premium caravans, pop-tops and hybrid camper trailers. Kerry and the team had recognised that quality control was a major gap in the industry and made it their mission to ensure the highest standards for critical components, which in turn led to the redesign of all SWAG models and a move towards locally controlled manufacturing processes, combining Australian design and sourcing for components and accessories.

This decision laid the foundation for SWAG's evolution, with the company now known for its innovative hybrid campers and caravans that seamlessly blend modern design with offroad durability.

SWAG
CAMPER TRAILERS
MACADAMIAS & ALMONDS

INTRODUCING THE NEW GEN 8 SERIES

Looking ahead, SWAG continues to push the envelope with its exciting new releases. One highly anticipated model is the upcoming Gen 8 series of caravans, set to launch in mid-2025.

"It's been a while in the making, but we've noticed that more and more hybrid manufacturers are moving away from the traditional idea of hybrid living by adding large internal fridges, ovens, microwaves and washing machines," said Kerry Stacey.

The new Gen 8 will stay true to the essence of simple, functional hybrid living, but with a few exciting upgrades. With more storage space, a new kitchen layout and improved Victron battery management systems, the Gen 8 aims to provide an even more practical, lightweight experience for a wide range of travellers – from first-time campers to seasoned explorers – all with the high quality and durability SWAG is known for.

"We're also staying true to our commitment to supporting local, continuing to use trusted Australian brands and products in our fit-outs," said Kerry. "And as always, we aim to keep our prices accessible for Aussie families who want to explore the great outdoors."

BUSHWAKKA
SCT13-MAX
OWNED & OPERATED SWAG
LIVING THE DREAM SWAG
SWAG
CAMPER T

ABOVE AND BELOW SWAG's newest model, the SCT13 Adventure model; Built to withstand Australia's harsh conditions

CRAFTED FOR AUSSIE EXPLORERS

Every SWAG model is built to withstand Australia's harsh environments, from the scorching heat of the outback to the unpredictable terrain of remote tracks like the iconic Gibb River Road.

The design process happens in-house, and every hybrid and caravan undergoes detailed 3D CAD modelling before production is approved, models which are then sent to an independent Australian testing facility for certification. After the model is approved, the production process takes place at SWAG's manufacturing partner in China.

Once built, the chassis and body are sent back to SWAG's factory on the Sunshine Coast where the team completes the final assembly and fit out with all the locally sourced critical components such as electrics, gas system and battery installation.

The SWAG models are now in their eighth generation, offering a single-piece galvanised chassis, composite walls, honeycomb floors and a lightweight, narrow-bodied design that is perfect for reaching those hard to reach but worth the effort destinations.

A VERSATILE LINEUP

SWAG Off-Road Campers understands that Australian travellers are as diverse as the landscapes they explore. Whether you're a couple seeking a compact getaway, a family looking for a space to bring the kids (and the dog!) or an offroad enthusiast craving rugged exploration, there's a SWAG model designed to meet your needs.

For couples after a compact option, the SCT13 hybrid pop-top offers the perfect balance of comfort and offroad capability. This hybrid may be small, but it's fully equipped with a king-size bed, large stainless-steel outdoor kitchen, ample storage, 400W of solar and an ensuite – equally ideal for short getaways or extended road trips. And if a pop-top isn't your style, there is a hard-top version of the SCT13 available as well.

The SWAG team is particularly proud of its newest 13ft Adventure model. This van has quickly become a favourite in the SWAG lineup and features a Bushwakka 270 awning which is easy to set up and offers plenty of shade coverage to extend your outdoor living area, plus upgraded Tough Dog 4WD Suspension and a Victron battery system.

ABOVE AND BELOW Enjoy the comforts of home while exploring Australia's remote areas; There's a model to suit every style of traveller

> *"The new SCT13 Adventure model has quickly become a favourite in the SWAG lineup* and features a Bushwakka 270 awning"

The SCT16 and SCT17 models are perfect for couples who want a little more space but still want to spend some time off-grid. Both feature full ensuites with separate toilet and shower, reverse-cycle air conditioning and offroad resilience that allows you to tackle the roughest terrains. The SCT16 is the narrower of the two and comes in both pop-top and hard-top versions. We were fortunate enough to check out the Gen 6 SCT16 pop-top at Australia's Best Hybrids 2024 and the judges were impressed by not only its compact interior layout but also its light weight, which gave it a higher payload and comparatively low ATM (2800kg) suitable for lower-rated tow vehicles (check out the full review online).

Families are not left out of the equation. SWAG's 4B and 5B models are designed with kids (and pets!) in mind, offering comfortable bunk beds and plenty of room for the whole family. Despite their size, these models are lightweight and narrow-bodied, making them easier to tow and perfect for reaching those remote camping spots that larger caravans simply can't access.

For those who crave flexibility, SWAG offers a range of models that are suited for everything from weekend trips to extended off-grid journeys and everything in between. The brand's split ensuite models are especially popular for those seeking more privacy and comfort on longer trips.

These features, along with SWAG's traditional construction methods and Aussie testing, make its hybrids and caravans a favourite among many outdoor adventurers.

> “Whether you’re a grey nomad, a family on a road trip or an offroad adventurer, *SWAG has the perfect camper to help you experience Australia’s great outdoors”*

SCT16-MAX
Generation 6
SCT16
MAX
SWAG
OFF-ROAD CAMPERS

ABOVE AND BELOW The SCT16 is one of SWAG’s most popular models; The SWAG community stretches far and wide

THE SWAG COMMUNITY

SWAG is dedicated to building its community and has cultivated a dedicated following of outdoor enthusiasts who regularly share their adventures on social media platforms and within exclusive community groups. The team at SWAG stays actively engaged with this community, gathering feedback and offering support to ensure that every customer has a seamless experience with their product. In fact, the brand’s relationship with its customers has led to exciting partnerships, such as becoming an authorised installer of Bushwakka awnings – something of which the team is particularly proud.

As the company continues to grow, it remains deeply committed to maintaining the same level of personal care and attention to detail that has made it a trusted name in the Australian camping and caravan market. From warranty support to customer service, SWAG ensures that every camper is ready for whatever adventures lie ahead.

EXPLORE WITH CONFIDENCE

SWAG offers extensive after-sale support, with a comprehensive warranty package that includes a one-year limited manufacturer's warranty and a five-year structural warranty. Customer service is a priority, with the team responding to warranty claims within 72 hours, ensuring that issues are always addressed promptly. Whether it's a minor repair or a major service, SWAG ensures that customers receive the care and attention they need to keep their camper in top shape.

READY FOR YOUR NEXT ADVENTURE

For those embarking on the ultimate Australian adventure – whether that's a Big Lap around the country or exploring remote offroad tracks – SWAG Off-Road Campers offers a product that is as reliable as it is comfortable.

With an ever-expanding range of models (including special editions and upgrade options) tailored to different types of travellers, and a steadfast commitment to building models that can handle Aussie conditions, it's clear that SWAG Off-Road Campers will remain one of Australia's trusted manufactures. Whether you're a grey nomad, a family on a road trip or an offroad adventurer, SWAG has the perfect camper to help you experience Australia's great outdoors – without compromise.

For more information on the latest models and upcoming releases, visit SWAG Off-Road Campers online (swagcampertrailers.com.au) or at one of its showrooms across Australia.

ABOVE AND BELOW Tackling the Oodnadatta Track, SA; Remote camping in Sawpit Gorge, WA

Words
TIM VAN DUYL
Pics
TED AIREY
Video
CAPTURE FACTORY, SIDESWIPE PRODUCTIONS AND JOSH HANGER

DOES THIS BEAT THE 79 SERIES LANDCRUISER?

Go anywhere in Australia and you'll see a 79 Series LandCruiser. The workhorse has had the market of heavy-duty dual cabs for decades but as time passed and the Toyota sat still, never receiving a real refinement upgrade, the door was left open. Enter the all-new INEOS Grenadier-based Quartermaster.

SCAN TO PLAY VIDEO

IN BRIEF

The longer wheelbase Grenadier handles rough driving with aplomb and should tow just as well

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Best-in-class offroad
- Best-in-class driveline

CONS

- Moderate payload
- Cramped rear seats

ABOVE The INEOS Grenadier Quartermaster is at home in the outback

From chippies and plumbers in the suburbs using the 79 Series LandCruiser to tow a tradies trailer to a forestry gang plodding along a fire trail and farmers with a sunburnt ARB fridge and a dog chain on the back ... you'll see a 79 Series anywhere and everywhere in Australia. And then there are those who love an accessory and modifying the platform. You know the ones with the built rigs jacked to the sky with a canopy and awning on a beach in Far North Queensland. The 79's popularity knows no bounds. Its popularity is built on its specs, performance and the fact that it has been on the market for 25 years. It is an icon, and that has put a target on its back.

Newcomer INEOS has a lot of ground to cover to catch up with its competitor to the beloved 79 Series: the just-launched Grenadier Quartermaster. I'll get into the feel of what it is like to drive a Quartermaster in the outback a bit later in the review, but first some stats and specs for anyone wanting to know how they stack up on paper.

This table compares a 2.8L automatic GXL four-door 79 Series with a lick of Merlot Red paint to a diesel Quartermaster with an equally fancy hue of Queens Red and the optional Rough Pack which added lockers (standard on

> *"It has much better sound deadening and feel* when at speed than the 79 Series"

	LC79 DOUBLE-CAB GXL	QUARTERMASTER (DIESEL)
Engine, power and torque	2.8L, 150kW, 500Nm	3L, 183kW, 550Nm
Transmission	Six-speed auto	Eight-speed auto
Kerb weight	2185kg*	2718kg
Payload	1365kg	832kg
Gross vehicle mass	3510kg	3550kg
Tow capacity (braked)	3500kg	3500kg
Gross combined mass	7010kg	7000kg
CarPlay/Android Auto	Included	Included
Screen size	6.4in	12.3in
AEB	Standard	Standard
Warranty	Five-year, unlimited kilometres	Five-year, unlimited kilometres
Wheels and tyres	16in alloy wheels and Dunlop Grandtrek AT1 AT tyres	Optional 17in steel and BFG KO2 tyres
Diff lockers	Standard on GLX	Optional Eaton eLocker electrical locking differentials
Fuel capacity	130L	90L
RRP*	$96,000**	$112,205**

**Supplied as a cab chassis, add on around 90–110kg for a basic tray or factory tub*
***Prices are ex-Melbourne, including on-roads as at 26/11/2024*

ABOVE Well laid out controls and excellent Recaro seats

the GXL), plus upgraded wheels and tyres to get as close as I could to a matching specs lineup.

You'll see that the payloads are wildly different, but there is an asterisk when it comes to the kerb weight. The 79 Series comes as a cab chassis, so you need to add on the weight of a tub to make it a fair fight. In saying that, the INEOS is still outgunned by more than 300kg.

Both have CarPlay/Android Auto and five-year, unlimited kilometre warranties. Where they separate again is on price, with the LandCruiser around $16,000 more affordable, but there is a catch.

The Grenadier-based Quartermaster is such a good place to be. I'll assume you've experienced a 70 Series LandCruiser, so you know it's about as comfortable as a forklift on a gravel yard and I'll admit, as I get older, I'm realising I don't want to live that way.

FIRST AUSTRALIAN DRIVE OF THE QUARTERMASTER

Our test route was decent, if short on time (all press launches are). We started in Whyalla, SA, pushed onto Quorn and into the depths of the Flinders Ranges. Trip highlights were the always-spectacular Wilpena Pound, Arden Vale Road, Brachina Gorge and Nilpena Ediacara National Park. We covered around 900km with two drivers per car sharing duties and regular chances to swap into other models and variants.

If you want to see where we went, roughly, the best place to look is in the *Flinders Ranges Atlas & Guide* by Hema Maps. Google Maps is unreliable for planning out there and unusable on the road unless you have Starlink as there is little reception in the deep valleys. Luckily for us, we were not driving a forklift – we had it better.

HOW THE QUARTERMASTER DIFFERS FROM THE STATION WAGON VARIANT

The two variants (Grenadier Quartermaster versus the standard Grenadier) differ by 305mm between the front and rear wheels, the back has been cut off and the Quartermaster's rear axle has been moved back to better take a load in the tub. That's really about it.

THE INEOS IS MORE COMFORTABLE

The INEOS Grenadier Quartermaster is special. Even in the low spec I've used as an example above. It has exceptional Recaro seats, a 12.3in infotainment screen, grab handles in the right spots and much better sound deadening and feel when at speed than the 79 Series. It is not Rolls-Royce quiet, especially when equipped with the KO2s (one option I'd always tick), but it is better than the 79 Series.

> “The rear seats are slightly elevated which gives passengers a better view of the world while under them is where you’ll find a dedicated charger and second battery”

ABOVE With the rear seats folded, the space is practical and durable

If you’ve driven a Jeep Wrangler or LandCruiser 70 Series, you’ll find the INEOS a better steer too, but neither the 79 Series nor Quartermaster could be considered easy or good to steer. Their solid front axles are durable and great when offroad, but they limit a lot of geometry that modern independent front suspension allows for. With no camber, they tend to lean and scrub their tyres in fast cornering. It’s a sacrifice in the same way everything is, always. Do you want better offroad ability? On-road driving will suffer.

Offroad driving, though, wow, the Quartermaster excels and blasts the 79 Series out of the water. The reason is down to suspension, where they are fundamentally different.

COIL VERSUS LEAF SUSPENSION

The INEOS uses a progressive-rate coil spring made by the experts at Eibach at each corner while the 79 Series uses coils in the front and some seriously heavy-duty leaf packs in the rear.

The LandCruiser’s leaf pack is meaty with seven main springs and two helpers. They are designed with the longest springs softer than the shortest. The idea is that as you load the tray and as they compress, the stiffer springs do more work. It sounds like a progressive rate, but they have nothing on the coils in the INEOS.

The initial compression in the Quartermaster suspension is much more compliant than the 79 Series. The coil springs take small bumps like road reflectors well and as you ask more of them, say in washouts on gravel roads at speed, they show their metal, stiffening up. Paired with ZF dampers (the same mob that does the excellent gearbox), the suspension works well, though we did find the front bump stops a fair bit (the bumpstops are impressively soft, by the way).

One thing you will not hide from is the weight of the Quartermaster. The INEOS is a heavy beast. You wouldn’t think it looking at it but it’s more than the weight of a Ford F-150, Ranger Raptor and the 79 Series by a fair margin. The base Quartermaster, with the diesel engine option, comes in at 2718kg and that’s before you add on options. The 79 Series with a decent tray is going to weigh around 2300kg in GXL trim.

Yet the INEOS trumps the 79 Series at speed on and off the road. I would suggest it is down to its more compliant ride and wider track; the Quartermaster, like the wagon it’s based on, handles dirt roads really well.

But it’s not the kerb weight we care about, we know we’ll add a heap of gear to either of these workhorses, it’s just that you can add a bit more to the 79 Series. So, how would we build a Quartermaster? I’m glad you ask.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY 6.5/10
How I’d build one would top $200,000 and how I’d have it delivered from INEOS would make up over $130,000 of that; it’s a lot of money then, but it is well spec’d and more than capable

TOWING PERFORMANCE N/A
We didn’t tow with the Quartermaster, but we know the SUV does the task with aplomb, so expect the ute will too

HITCHING UP 7/10
The high-definition camera is good but we’d like to see some tech like Trailer Light Check fitted

CREATURE COMFORTS 8/10
CarPlay and Android Auto lead the charge and are backed up with seriously good Recaro seats

ACCESSIBILITY OF SPARE PARTS 7/10
I suspect it is getting better as more vehicles land, but right now, the network is small

FUEL ECONOMY 8/10
The diesel is best (no surprise). Unhitched, we saw around 13L/100km in spirited offroad driving

SOLO PERFORMANCE 7/10
The reversing camera is decent. It would be good to see trailer light checking programming in the future

ENGINE POWER 8.5/10
Both the diesel and petrol do a great job

INNOVATION 8/10
The Euro Pallet-sized tub is nice as is having coil suspension in the rear

X-FACTOR 8.5/10
It’s uncommon, robust and hard working; everyone will want to talk about it

HOW WE'D OPTION OUR DREAM QUARTERMASTER

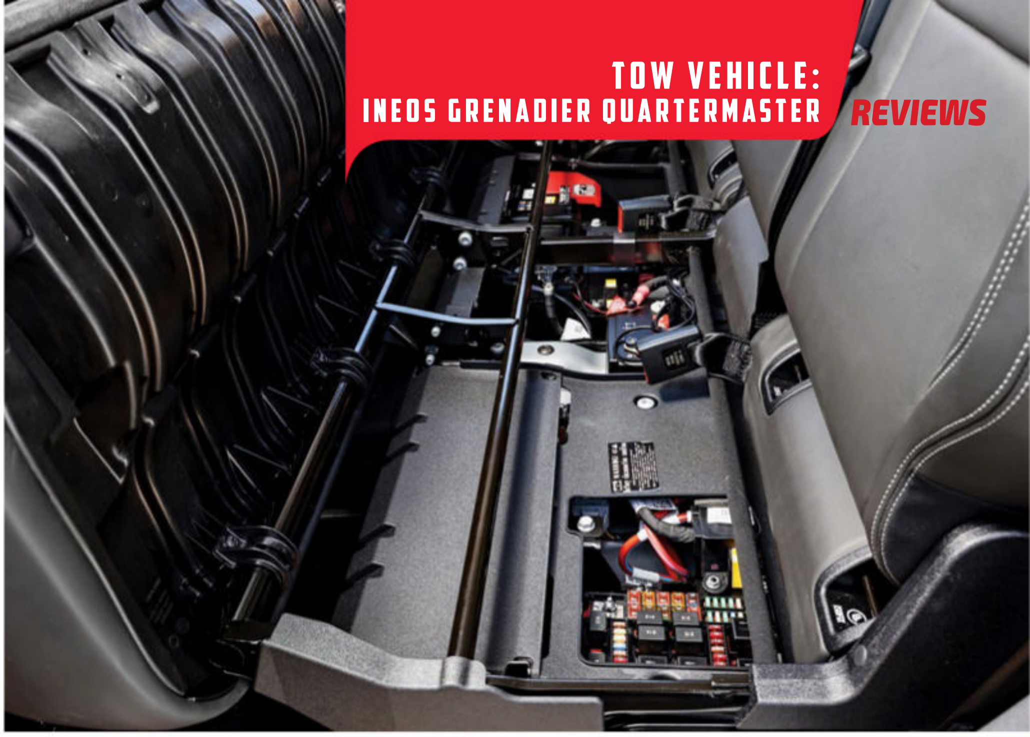
Have a play with the excellent Grenadier Configurator (ineosgrenadier.com/en/au/the-vehicle/vehicle-configurator). There, you can choose your body style (station wagon, Quartermaster or cab chassis), pick your trim level and add all of the options you could dream of. Once you've built yours, you can essentially order it through your local dealer, or you can share it with your mates.

We went crazy, you can see what we came up with using the QR code – our dream Quartermaster*, if you will.

*So, the excellent Rhino-Rack supplied roof platforms were not showing up on the configurator, but we'd add it on.

Here is a table of the options and specs we'd choose, and we'll explain below.

For us, you have to start with the Trialmaster as it gets you a heap of options built into two packs.



ABOVE A second battery and dedicated charger are located under the rear seat

QUARTERMASTER TRIALMASTER OPTIONS	PRICING
Quartermaster Trialmaster	$118,000
Devil Red paint	$1315
Contrast roof — Inky Black	$2460
Contrast ladder frame — HALO Red	$1650
Heat reflective privacy glass	$770
Seat covers — front	$530
Rubber floor mats	$381
Roo bar	$2510
Side protection rails	$880
Rock sliders	$1758
Checkerplates	$560
Integrated HD winch (5.5T)	$5990
Total RRP at 25 Nov 2024	$136,804

The Trialmaster includes:

- Raised air intake
- Exterior utility belt
- Loading bay liner
- Cargo bay utility rails
- Auxiliary battery
- High load auxiliary switch panel and electrical preparation
- Compass with altimeter

And the Rough Pack which includes:

- Differential locks front and rear
- BFGoodrich All-Terrain KO2 tyres

And the Smooth Pack which adds:

- Rear-view camera
- Park Assist Front (PDC)
- Power heated exterior mirrors
- Heated windscreen washer jets
- Central stowage box, lockable
- Puddle lamps and ambient door lighting

From there it's into the extra options. We'd take ours in Devil Red, a new colour for the MY24 INEOS range, with a black roof. If you are worried about paint fade, go the Eldoret Blue with a white roof.

An option we have yet to see on delivered vehicles in Australia is a contrasting chassis. Partly to match the Devil Red body paint but mostly because we support the cause, we'd opt for the Red HALO Chassis. In doing that, INEOS will donate some of the cost to HALO Trust, a foundation set up by a pair of British Soldiers to remove mines from war-torn regions. Go look them up, they are doing great work.

The total cost of our dream Quartermaster is a bit under $137,000, a fair chunk of change ... but we are not finished yet.

Ideally pre-registration, we'd get a GVM upgrade from the likes of DMW Industries or More 4X4, both of which can get your Quartermaster to around 3900-4000kg GVM (depending on state laws and so on) at around $5800, plus fitting.

Then it's off to Norweld for an Elite Tray which starts at $18,990 and a Deluxe Canopy starting from $19,205, and then we'd fit it out with a REDARC suite and Bushman's upright fridge, while underneath we'd get a Brown Davis extended fuel tank which adds a whopping 78L further capacity. Apparently, around 10 per cent of Grenadier buyers in Australia fit these tanks.

All up, ours would probably set us back in the region of $230,000 to $250,000. Harking back to the 79 Series, again, a lot of you have probably dreamt up a build of one of them and you probably came to around the same price. Even though the Quartermaster is a heap more outlay up front, it equals out once you start building it.

As you do a GVM upgrade on the LandCruiser, you'll likely move to higher load-rated wheels and tyres, however, you can leave the 17in steelies on the Grenadier with the KO2s that come supplied.

There is another area you can save on, Norweld and INEOS are doing a collaboration on trays with a $7000 contribution towards certain trays – there are T&Cs and it's not indefinite, so go talk to them and don't cry to us if you missed it.

Interestingly, how I'd have a Quartermaster is about the same as the INEOS Skunkworks build dubbed Kaiju which you can read about on the INEOS website.

DRIVING DISTANCES IN AN INEOS

Some of you will know that I've covered some 6500km in various Grenadiers and most of it towing. I have been lucky enough to take four in a convoy from Melbourne to Rainbow Beach in Queensland, down to Broken Hill and back to Melbourne, which you can see in our video on the *Caravan World* YouTube channel.

There is a bit to unpack from that test, but it also left a few people wondering about things I didn't cover, so we'll start there.

> *"The overall space and ergonomics of the interior are hard for me to comment on* as I do not fit in many cars"

INEOS GRENADIER QUARTERMASTER

SPECS

EXTERIOR DIMENSIONS

Length 5400m (5.4m/17ft 7in)
Width (inc. mirrors) 2146m (2.15m/7ft)
Wheelbase 3227mm (3.23m/10ft 6in)
Track width 1650mm (1.65m/5ft 4in)
Rear overhang 1328mm (1.33m/4ft 4in)

OFFROAD GEOMETRY

Ground clearance 264mm (26.4cm/10.4in)
Approach angle 36.2 degrees
Departure angle 22.6 degrees
Wading depth (still water) 800mm (80cm/31.5in)
Wheel travel 585mm (58.5cm/1ft 9in)

WEIGHTS AND CAPACITIES (DIESEL BASE MODEL)

Kerb mass 2718kg
Payload 832kg
Gross vehicle mass 3550kg
Gross combined mass 7000kg
Roof load (dynamic) 120kg
Roof load (static) 375kg
Towing capacity (braked) 3500kg
Towball weight limit 350kg
Tub height/lift-in height 906mm
Fuel capacity 90L
AdBlue capacity (diesel only) 17L

SUSPENSION AND BRAKES

Front and rear 5-link with coil springs
Axles Solid front and rear
Gross vehicle mass 3550kg
Gross combined mass 7000kg
Towing capacity (braked) 3500kg
Towball weight limit 350kg
Fuel capacity 90L
AdBlue capacity (diesel only)17L

WARRANTY

Manufacturer's warranty Five years, unlimited mileage
Whole vehicle anti-perforation warranty 12 years
Accessories warranty Five years

POWERTRAINS

	PETROL	DIESEL
Engine	BMW B58	BMW B57
Cylinders and layout	6 (straight)	6 (straight)
Valves	24 (DOHC)	24 (DOHC)
Fuel delivery	Direct injection	Common rail direct injection
Displacement	2998cc	2993cc
Cylinder bore x stroke	82 x 94.6mm	84 x 90mm
Compression ratio	11.0:1	16.5:1
Maximum power	210kW @ 4750rpm	183Kw @ 3250-4200rpm
Maximum torque	450Nm @ 1750–4000 rpm	550Nm @ 1250–3000 rpm
Transmission	ZF 8HP51	ZF 8HP76
Transfer case	Two-speed Tremec	Two-speed Tremec
Transfer case ratio	2.5:1	2.5:1

MORE INFORMATION
INEOS Grenadier
P: 1800 319 816
W: ineosgrenadier.com/en/au

ABOVE AND BELOW The Quartermaster was tested on challenging tracks in the Flinders Ranges; We'd option on the excellent KO2 tyres on any Grenadier we owned

BFGoodrich

ADIER
INEOS
483

The left-side footrest is no problem for me. On the open road I set the cruise control and park my size 13 foot and forget about it. It is something people have fixated on yet no one I have spoken to who has a Grenadier has found it an issue. It just looks silly; it looks out of place and maybe that's the real issue.

The overall space and ergonomics of the interior are hard for me to comment on as I do not fit in many cars (a big reason why I love US trucks like the Ford F-150 so much), but I can confirm that the pedals being offset to the right of the steering column is reminiscent of old Italian sportscars; it is not ideal but also not an issue for the bulk of us, I imagine.

The rear seats are slightly elevated which gives passengers a better view of the world while under them is where you'll find a dedicated charger and second battery, if you option it within the Trialmaster or as a separate option. A detail I really like is that you can monitor the state of charge of the second battery on the infotainment screen and you can have your overhead wiring panel on separate channels to remove the chance of a fridge draining your starting battery.

In terms of fuel (and AdBlue) efficiency, the Grenadier with the B57 diesel is not bad. We hauled a big, big van and saw mid to high 20s per 100km covered. We did chew through some AdBlue, though, needing to top up the tank around 4000km into the drive which seemed a bit thirsty.

The petrol model used more fuel, to no one's surprise. It sat in the high 20s with an around 2000kg pop-top caravan. In the Quartermaster, with no towing, we saw mid-teens in spirited driving; I'm sure you could get it lower if you were not in as much of a hurry as we were.

Unhitched, driving the Quartermaster rather spiritedly, we saw around 13 litres per 100km travelled in a diesel Trialmaster. I suspect you could get closer to 10L/100km on the blacktop, driving more sedately.

POWERTRAIN HEAD-TO-HEAD

For outright power and torque and how that power is put to the ground, the INEOS Grenadier Quartermaster walks all over the LandCruiser 79 Series' 2.8L 1GD-FTV. The BMW-sourced diesel B57 has 33 more kilowatts and 50 more newton metres of torque than the Toyota, and as much as I like the Aisin six-speed auto that is found in the LandCruiser (also found in the Toyota Prado and HiLux), it is outgunned by what has to the be the best gearbox available today, the ZF 8HP by ZF.

With eight gears, the Quartermaster has a broad working range, however it is its lightning-fast yet smooth changes that are its best character. It's a gearbox found in luxury Bentleys down to more modest diesel BMW sedans and it's known worldwide as one of the best.

And if you were thinking the now unavailable 1VD V8 would be a better match, it's not. In manual only it's more work to drive and it has a lot less torque (450Nm). There was a bit of a craze fitting automatic gearboxes to V8 LandCruisers at costs of upwards of $20,000. Putting that money into a Grenadier makes more sense to me.

DRIVING AIDS OR NANNIES?

On this trip over to the Flinders Ranges we worked the Quartermaster hard only once. Triple-locked, in low range and with liberal throttle applied, we needed a couple of runs at a serious climb on the outskirts of Whyalla, SA. You'll see in the pics and

ABOVE Author Tim van Duyl after his 900km test of the INEOS Grenadier Quartermaster

> *"The Quartermaster is a worthy challenger to the incumbent LandCruiser in so many ways* and it trumps it in a few too"

in the video that the hill was no joke, yet we tackled it at placard tyre pressures and with only a little help from a spotter. For these climbs and in some soft-sand driving we tackled in the Flinders Ranges, we used Off-Road Mode which reduces interference from the Bosch-supplied traction control, electronic sway control (ESC) and the like.

Back at the international launch in 2022, where I drove the five-door Grenadier from Inverness most of the way to Glasgow in Scotland, we trialled more of the aids built into the range like Hill Decent control and Wading Mode (the Grenadier is rated to still-water depths of 800mm even with the raised intake). There it excelled, particularly descending steep, snowy tracks high in the mountains.

All Grenadiers are permanent 4x4 with a Tremec transfer case used to lock the centre diff and to drop the final drive ratio a further 2.5:1 when low range is selected. The differentials are by Carraro with Eaton eLockers (if optioned) and the CV joints and axles are by Dyna, all household names in the industry. I checked with the engineers and the crown wheels are in the region of 220mm, about the same size as Toyota uses. The front steering dampener is a little exposed, running in line with the front axle on right-hand drive vehicles like ours.

THE PRACTICAL PART: TUB OR CAB CHASSIS

You know we'd fit a tray and canopy to any Quartermaster we'd own but that's not to say the factory tub is no good. It will fit a Euro pallet between the wheel wells and so long as it's under the payload limit, it'll take it almost anywhere without too much fuss as there are a number of tie points to hold down odd loads.

The spare tyre is sat in the tub (if we kept the tub), the roof-mounted Rhino-Rack platform would make a great place to carry a second spare or move the first to as the load rating is 375kg static or 120kg dynamic, plenty for a spare or a decent roof top tent.

THE WRAP

There is no hiding from the weight of the Quartermaster which is part of the reason its payload is not as impressive as the archaic 79 Series LandCruiser, so it's not perfect. An easy fix would be a GVM upgrade which could easily add 500kg to its carrying capacity.

What you will not have to fix is the build quality and driving experience of the INEOS. It stands out when offroad as one of if not the most capable 4X4s on sale today, yet on road its manners are better than expected for anyone that understands the way solid axle 4WDs handle.

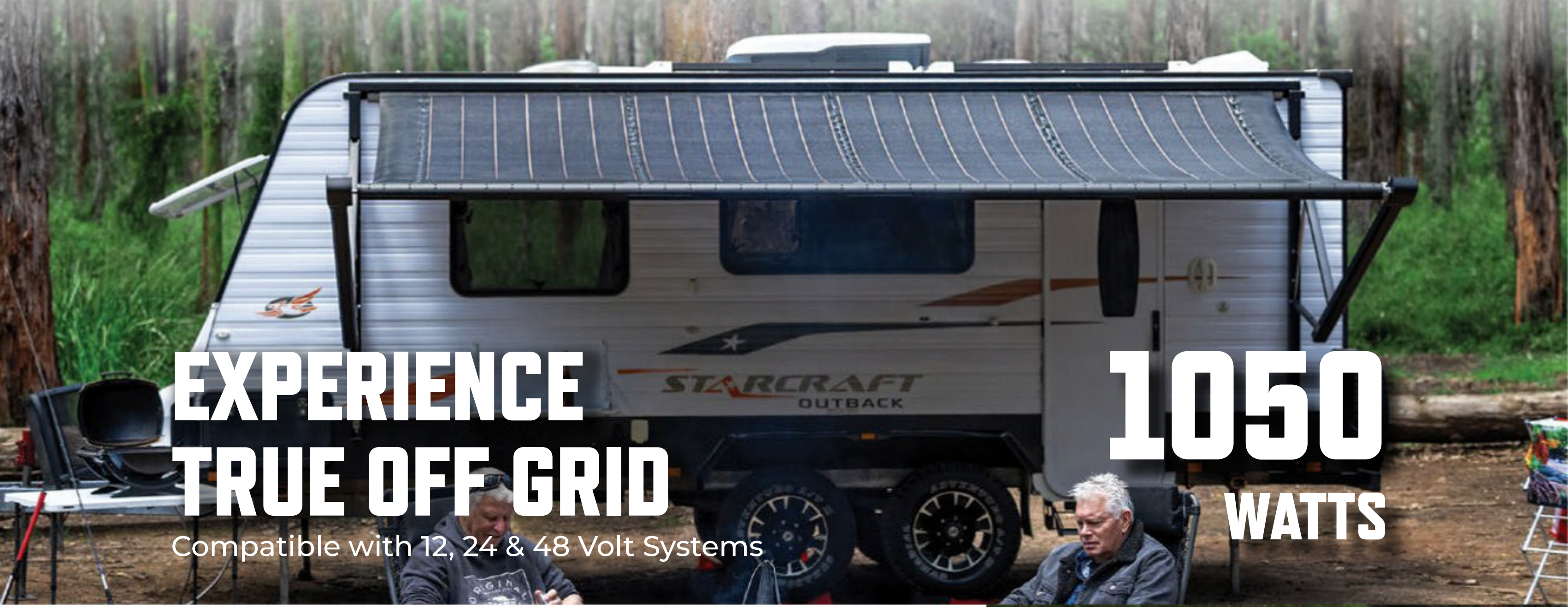
The Quartermaster is a worthy challenger to the incumbent LandCruiser in so many ways and it trumps it in a few too. What it has done the best at is highlighting that the LandCruiser is getting old and although it has the measure for load capacity and parts availability, the INEOS continues to impress and should be on the radar of any business or person looking for a well-built 4x4 capable of towing a big load in serious conditions.

WORLDS FIRST

FLEXIBLE

SOLAR AWNING

LA LUXURY AWNINGS By GOLDEN SOLAR



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ABOVE A visit to Wyangala Dam is a must when exploring Cowra and the surrounding region

COWRA: A SCENIC ESCAPE IN WIRADJURI COUNTRY

From captivating wartime history to relaxing vineyards and outdoor adventures, there's no shortage of ways to unwind and explore in this charming NSW town.

Words Robert Crack Pics Supplied

The Australian tourism industry has seen strong recovery post-pandemic, driven by pent-up demand. While higher prices haven't deterred tourists, they are more selective in their destination choices. Regional tourism is highly competitive, with 76 regions vying for visitors, longer stays and higher spending. In regional NSW, tourism has experienced the highest growth, attracting visitors with its natural wonders and iconic events. However, destinations offering only similar attractions may struggle to stand out, while those with unique features are more successful in drawing tourists, particularly caravanners.

Cowra – in Central West NSW – not only stands out among the crowd; when it comes to points of difference, it absolutely steals the show.

So many towns in Australia share common threads of geography, topography, geology, ecology or history, it is not often that just one town can lay claim to being the town with the 'only', 'largest', 'oldest', 'longest', 'widest', 'first' or 'smallest' of something.

But Cowra can, justifiably laying claim to being the site of the largest land-fought military battle on Australian soil during World War II, known as the Cowra Breakout, which took place on 5 August 1944.

The Cowra Breakout was not only the largest Prisoner of War (POW) breakout of WWII but also the largest mass prison escape in modern history and the deadliest escape attempt ever by Japanese POWs.

And Cowra can claim some other superlatives too, including a direct connection with the first Japanese POW captured in Australia, the first relatively intact Mitsubishi Zero aircraft captured by the Allies during World War II and the largest Japanese Garden in the Southern Hemisphere.

HOME OF THE WIRADJURI PEOPLE

Nestled in the picturesque Lachlan Valley and set along the banks of the Galari Bila (Lachlan River), Cowra is a charming country town known for its rich history, natural beauty and vibrant culture, offering a mix of experiences that appeal both to seasoned travellers and those just starting to explore the open road.

Whether you're a grey nomad on a long-term adventure or an empty nester seeking a peaceful getaway, Cowra has something for everyone.

A LEGACY OF PEACE AND REFLECTION

By 1944, the Cowra POW Camp housed more than 2000 prisoners, including Italians, Japanese and conscripts from occupied countries. The camp housed prisoners, the 22nd Garrison Battalion, some RAAF personnel and Australian Women's Army Service (AWAS) personnel.

On 5 August 1944 more than 1000 Japanese prisoners at Camp B staged an escape. Armed with improvised weapons such as baseball bats, kitchen cutlery and gardening tools, they started fires, attacked the Australian guards and rushed the fences after a bugle sounded, seeking to 'die with honour' rather than continue in captivity.

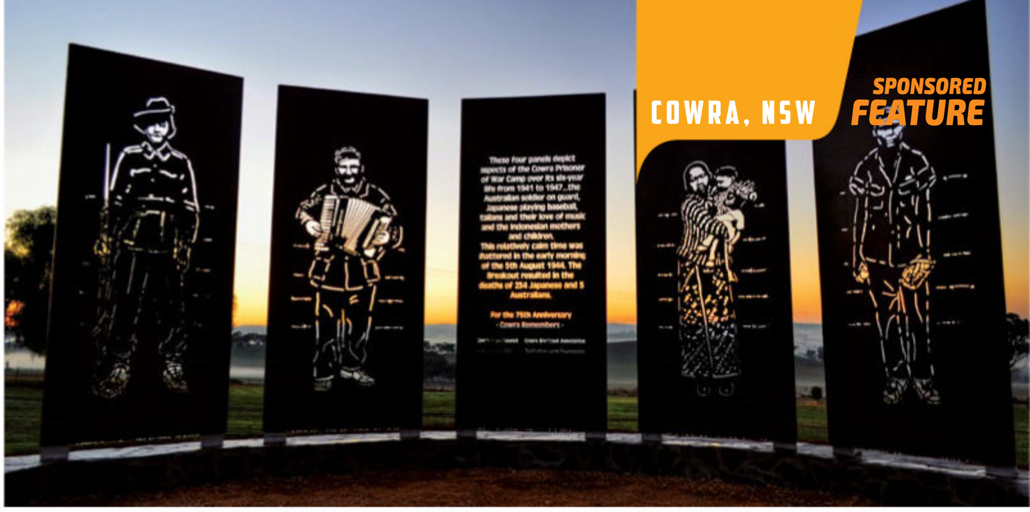
Privates Ben Hardy and Ralph Jones, who manned a machine gun, were posthumously awarded the George Cross for bravery. The breakout led to more than 350 prisoners escaping, 234 Japanese and five Australians killed, and 108 Japanese and four Australians wounded. Over nine days, 334 prisoners were recaptured. At least 30 of the deceased Japanese prisoners died by their own hand.

The bugler, Sergeant Hajime Toyoshima, a Japanese pilot of a Mitsubishi A6M2 Zero aircraft from the aircraft carrier *Hiryu*, had been the first Japanese POW captured in Australia, during the first air raid on Darwin in 1942. Toyoshima's aircraft was the first relatively intact Zero captured by the Allies. He died by suicide after escaping during the Cowra breakout. That bugle also signalled the start of the only land battle on Australian soil in World War II, and it is now part of the Australian War Memorial collection.

Cowra's relationship with Japan has deepened over time, symbolised by a Japanese cemetery, gardens and a peace bell representing enduring friendship. Australia's World Peace Bell symbolises global peace (awarded in 1992), and the garden was designed by Takeshi Nakajima. Cowra's Australian Peace Bell is the only World Peace Bell not located in a city.

Some other key sites to visit include:

- **Cowra Japanese Garden and Cultural Centre:** Stroll through beautifully landscaped gardens – the largest Japanese garden in the Southern Hemisphere – and enjoy a peaceful setting while reflecting on the region's history.


These four panels depict aspects of the Cowra Prisoner of War Camp over its six-year life from 1941 to 1947...the Australian soldier on guard, Japanese playing baseball, Italians and their love of music and the Indonesian mothers and children.
This relatively calm time was shattered in the early morning of the 5th August 1944. The breakout resulted in the deaths of 234 Japanese and 5 Australians.
For the 75th Anniversary
- Cowra Remembers -

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Tour at Rosnay Organic Wines; Five Panel Sculpture at Cowra POW Camp; Aerial of Cowra POW Water Tank Murals

- **Prisoner of War Campsite:** These days known as the Cowra POW Camp, during its operation it was known as a 'P.W. and I Group (Prisoner of War and Internment)'. Visit the replica guard tower and commemorative sculptures or take a quiet moment at the viewing platform overlooking the historical site. Dedicated on 5 August 1966, Cowra POW Camp Site Memorial is on the New South Wales Heritage Register.
- **War cemeteries:** Pay your respects at the Australian, Indonesian and Japanese war cemeteries, where the spirit of peace and reconciliation continues.

NATURE, ADVENTURE AND SCENIC VIEWS

- **Lachlan River Walk:** Enjoy the tranquil setting along the river, with Indigenous art murals adorning the bridge pylons.
- **Bellevue Hill Lookout:** Take in panoramic views over the town and surrounding countryside or let the kids loose at the Cowra Nature Based Adventure Playground.
- **Cycling and walking trails:** Stroll or cycle along the Cowra Peace Precinct and explore the Garrison Walk.
- If you're feeling more adventurous, you can even paddle on the river or relax on the 'beach' at **Farleigh Reserve** – perfect for a peaceful afternoon. Overnight camping is now permitted at the reserve; for more information phone 02 6342 4333 or email info@cowratourism.com.au

EXPLORE THE ARTS AND LOCAL CULTURE

- **Cowra Regional Art Gallery:** Discover a variety of exhibitions that showcase local talent.
- **Cowra Sculpture Park:** Stroll through the park and enjoy impressive art installations.
- Spectacular and meaningful **art murals** (Indigenous Art Murals, Cowra POW Water Tank Murals, Cowra Laneway Mural and Cowra Civic Square Mural) are scattered across Cowra, creating a unique urban art experience.

WINE, FOOD AND RELAXATION

Boasting a wide range of casual cafes, bistros and restaurants, Cowra is home to several highly acclaimed food establishments. Cowra's chefs consistently turn local produce into mouth-watering meals.

- **Best coffee in town:** Cowra Japanese Garden Cafe or the Breakout Brasserie.
- **Best dinner meals:** The Imperial Hotel (Pub) or Oak on Kendal (fine dining).

Shopping in Cowra is relaxed and easy, with plenty of parking and friendly country service.

The Cowra Wine Region is home to some of the most exceptional wine tasting experiences and wineries in NSW. It is renowned for producing award-winning wines with organic practices, and there's a full list of wineries available online: visitcowra.com.au

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Experience Cowra's 'Fields of Gold' in spring; Cowra township; Cowra is home to the largest Japanese Garden in the Southern Hemisphere; Lachlan Valley Railway Heritage Museum

ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS FOR EVERY TRAVELLER

Whether you're in a caravan, motorhome or looking for a cabin stay, Cowra has a range of accommodation options to suit your needs.

Cowra Van Park: Located beside the Lachlan River, this park offers powered and unpowered sites, ensuite cabins and pet-friendly options. Facilities include free wi-fi, a camp kitchen, barbecues and easy access to the town's shops and restaurants.
W: cowravanpark.com.au

Cowra Holiday Park: Just five minutes from Cowra's CBD, this rustic park is perfect for a peaceful getaway. The park features self-contained cabins, powered sites and a heated pool. It's a great spot for a relaxing stay with all the comforts of home.
W: cowraholidaypark.com.au

Cowra Showground Camping: For a more rural experience, the Cowra Showground offers a large, flat camping area with both powered and unpowered sites. This pet-friendly spot is ideal for those seeking a simple, relaxed stay.
W: cowrashowground.com.au/camping-1

THINGS TO DO IN AND AROUND COWRA

- **Lachlan Valley Railway Heritage Centre:** Dive into the history of Cowra's rail system or take a scenic ride on a vintage tourist train on the last weekend of the month.
- **Europa Park:** Learn about Cowra's migrant and military training camps (Cowra was also the home of the Australian Recruit Training Centre in Word War II).

GETTING HERE AND AROUND

Cowra is easy to reach, conveniently located at the intersection of three major highways:

- **From Sydney:** Take the Great Western Highway via Lithgow and Bathurst.
- **From Canberra:** Travel via the Barton Highway, Yass and the Lachlan Valley Way.

With nearby towns such as Bathurst, Orange, Grenfell and Young just an hour to one-and-a half hours away, Cowra makes a great base from which to explore the surrounding region.

PLAN YOUR VISIT

For an easy guide to planning your trip, visit the Cowra website (visitcowra.com.au) and check out the Itinerary Planner (there are four day trips that cover Cowra, Canowindra, Woodstock, Wyangala Dam and further into the countryside), or download the Visitor Guide.

The **Cowra Visitor Information Centre** is an essential first stop for visitors to the Cowra region and is open 9am to 5pm, seven days a week, every day of the year (except Christmas Day). It offers local products and wares, a hologram about the 1944 POW breakout, a walking trail, a scale model of the former POW Camp and a nine-minute breakout presentation.

FESTIVALS AND EVENTS

You'll find beauty in every season in Cowra, but the region truly comes alive each spring when visitors can experience the rolling canola 'Fields of Gold' or witness the magical beauty of Cherry Blossom.

If you're visiting in winter, we recommend taking in the **Wyangala Bonfire and Fireworks Spectacular** (Kings Birthday Long Weekend in June). The **Cowra Wine Show** (19 July) is the perfect event for exploring Cowra's best wines.

See the sky filled with vibrant balloons at the annual **Canowindra International Ballon Festival** on from 26 April to 4 May.

Visit the stunning cherry blossoms at the Cowra Japanese Garden during the **Sakura Matsuri Cherry Blossom Festival** on 27 September or celebrate the arrival of autumn at sister festival to Sakura Matsuri, **Kōyō Matsuri,** on 2-3 May.

CLASSIC BUSH CAMPING IN WEDDIN

Uncover the best of Central NSW in the Weddin Mountains Region, where history, rugged landscapes and great bush camping await.

Words Amelia Mansell **Pics** Supplied

ABOVE There are plenty of places to camp with your van in the Weddin Mountains Region, NSW

Nestled in Central New South Wales, the Weddin Mountains Region offers a serene escape for those who enjoy true bush camping, local history, art and outdoor adventures. Home to the iconic town of Grenfell as well as the surrounding rural villages of Caragabal, Quandialla and Greenethorpe, there's plenty on offer in this beautiful slice of country NSW.

STEEPED IN HISTORY

Jutting up dramatically amid the flat agricultural plains, the Weddin Mountains have long been a landmark or meeting point for those who have inhabited this area of NSW, including its Traditional Owners, the Wiradjuri people. The name 'Weddin' comes from the Wiradjuri world 'Weedin', meaning a place to sit, stay or remain, which is quite fitting to this region and its serene mountain range.

Later years saw many arrive in the area to eke out an existence on the gold fields, closely followed by some infamous bushrangers who used the rugged landscape of the Weddin range as their refuge. These bushrangers included Ben Hall, who in 1862 – along with his gang – carried out what was then the largest gold robbery in Australian history, escaping with cash and gold worth more than a million dollars by today's standards – and legend says it's still hidden in the mountains.

The region's heart, Grenfell, is a must-visit for those who love exploring Australian history. This classic country town is the birthplace of one of Australia's most famous authors, Henry Lawson, and is home to the annual Henry Lawson Festival held in June.

CAMPING UNDER THE STARS

There are few things better than setting up camp surrounded by nature, with a campfire to warm you and expansive skies for stargazing each night. While the Weddin Mountains Region might not be a certified dark-sky destination, the clarity of Weddin's night sky is still one of the best you'll find. And no matter what your style of camping is, or the season, there are plenty of places to stay with your caravan.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Classic bush camping in the Weddin Mountains Region; Enjoy a campfire and stargazing; Always check fire bans and restrictions in the area first

WEDDIN MOUNTAINS NATIONAL PARK

Located just 18km southwest of Grenfell, Weddin Mountains National Park is a natural playground for those who love camping, bushwalking, mountain biking, birdwatching and more. The national park is home to plenty of local wildlife, including emus, grey kangaroos and red-necked wallabies. And twitchers, bring your binoculars for the chance to spot some rare bird species such as the peregrine falcon and turquoise parrot.

Seaton's Farm is a historic site also located at the Weddin Mountains National Park. This is a landmark that was built using only material that was readily available during the Great Depression.

The national park offers several marked walking tracks and hiking trails, lookouts and two main camping areas:

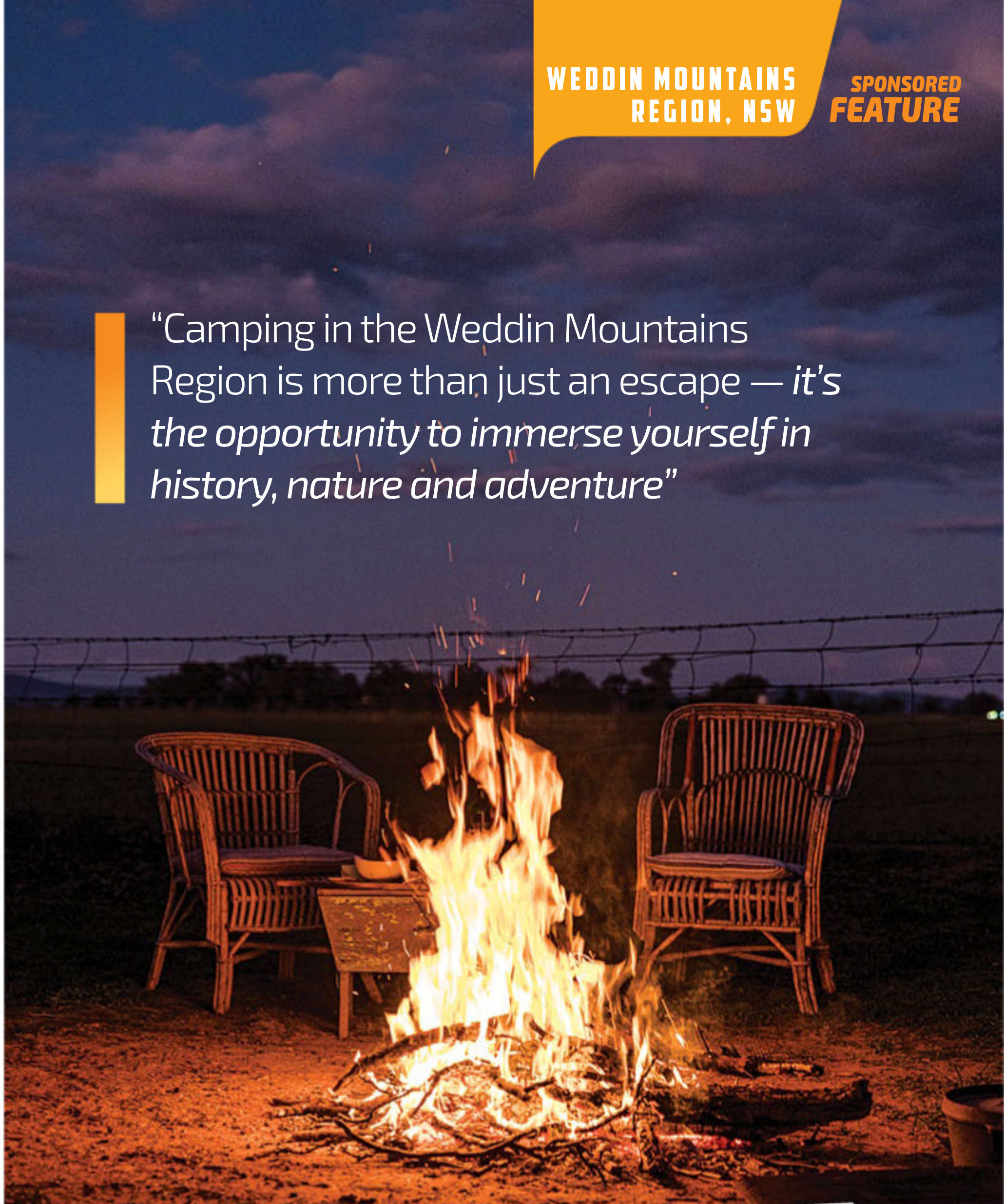
- **Ben Halls Campground:** Caravan and camper trailer friendly, this is a great base to explore the park, featuring picnic tables, barbecues, parking and toilet facilities. Ben Halls Cave is only a short walk away, and Lynchs Loop offers spectacular views of the surrounding landscape.
- **Holy Camp Rest Area (tent only):** A peaceful spot with access to the lookout below Eualdrie Trig Point, perfect for those wanting to catch a spectacular sunrise. It is said on a clear day you can see Mount Panorama.

WEDDIN STATE FORESTS

The Weddin Mountains Region has no shortage of areas to enjoy outdoor adventures, with 11 state forests to explore, nine of which offer free caravan-friendly camping, with plenty of space to spread out and enjoy the serene natural environment. If you're planning on having a campfire, please check for fire bans in the area, bring your own firewood or gas barbecue and follow fire safety precautions.

COMPANY DAM (COMPS DAM)

Just 2km northwest of Grenfell, Company Dam is another fan favourite for camping (including caravans and other RVs), walking, cycling and birdwatching. Built in 1867 for gold mining operations, it later supplied water for steam trains. These days, it's a peaceful retreat featuring a mix of woodland and wetland habitats with more than 50 recorded bird species and calm waters that make for a relaxing day of swimming, kayaking and yabbying.



> “Camping in the Weddin Mountains Region is more than just an escape — *it’s the opportunity to immerse yourself in history, nature and adventure”*

BEN HALL CREEK CAMP

If you’re looking for a unique place to set up camp, then this 8ha property is a must. Set up camp on the banks of the same creek where Ben Hall frequently stayed with his horses. There are large flat, grassy caravan-friendly sites ideal for self-sufficient campers, and the creek is perfect for fishing, yabbying or enjoying a refreshing dip. Check them out on Hip Camp.

CAMPING OPTIONS IN GRENFELL

If you want to stay closer to town, then the Grenfell Historic Railway Station is a great spot and only a short walk from the Grenfell Painted Silo – one of the town’s most photographed locations.

The Grenfell Showground, which backs onto Company Dam, is another good option for those who enjoy bushwalks, mountain biking and birdwatching.

If you need power and water, then the Grenfell Caravan Park or Showgrounds can help you out. These locations are only a short walk from Grenfell’s historic Main Street, where you can explore heritage buildings, boutique shops and eateries, and where you can enjoy the welcoming country hospitality of the locals.

MUST-VISIT ATTRACTIONS

Here are some local favourites and hidden gems to visit while you’re in the area:

- **Grenfell Silo Art:** A stunning mural by Heesco Khosnaran with a nighttime light show.
- **Grenfell Motel Mural:** A breathtaking nature-inspired mural by Scott Nagy and Mountain Ash Creative.
- **Iandra Castle:** A rare Australian homestead-castle hybrid (open days only).
- **The Cordial Factory:** A live music venue in Grenfell.
- **Glen Donald Estate:** Experience award-winning olive oils, fine produce and a farm experience the whole family can enjoy.
- **Caragabal and Quandialla Murals**
- **Grenfell’s museums and galleries:** including Grenfell Museum, Chrysler Car Museum and Grenfell Art Gallery featuring the Grenfell Community Curtain.

For those planning an extended trip to the area, we recommend taking the time to explore the villages of Caragabal, Quandialla and Greenethorpe. Explore the longer hiking trails in the Weddin Mountains National Park and join in local events and markets. Keep an eye on the Weddin Mountains Region website (visitweddin.com.au) for fun upcoming events such as the Caragabal Sheep Races and Weddin Mountain Muster.

ROAD TRIP ROUTES TO WEDDIN SHIRE

If you’re coming from Sydney, head via Cowra and stop in at the serene Japanese Gardens, the Cowra Prisoner of War Camp site and the Cowra Water Tower Art, which was completed in early February 2023 by Brightsiders, The Zookeeper and DRAPL.

For those coming from Melbourne, take the Hume Highway through Albury, the Olympic Highway through Wagga Wagga and then the Goldfields Way via Temora. If you love history and aviation, then make sure you stop in at the Temora Aviation Museum, which is home to some great historic aircraft displays.

An alternate route from Melbourne is to stay on the Hume for a bit longer to stop in at the Dog on the Tuckerbox outside Gundagai and head along the Olympic Highway via Young, the cherry capital of Australia (great for cherry picking experiences if you visit from early November through to early January). Detour via Harden to view the beautiful Murrumburrah Mill Silo Art by Heesco Khosnaran.

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Grenfell Picnic Races (12 April): A must-attend social and racing event.
- Iandra Castle Open Day (20 April and 8 June): A rare chance to explore this heritage estate.
- Grenfell Henry Lawson Festival (June long weekend): A celebration of poetry, music and arts.

EXPLORE THE HEART OF CENTRAL NSW

Camping in the Weddin Mountains Region is more than just an escape – it’s the opportunity to immerse yourself in history, nature and adventure. From breathtaking landscapes to its rich history, there’s something for every style of adventurer.

Jayco
Outbac
Journey
Outback
BLACK JACK

SOLO TRAVELLING

Words *Jennifer Johnston* **Pics** *Jennifer Johnston and supplied*

Everyone thinks about grey nomads as a couple, but hitting the road is not always as a duo. Sometimes it's about going solo.

ABOVE Nicole has become a confident solo caravanner

One of my friends, Nicole, lost her husband Don a year ago to a rare form of cancer. Their story is one you hear too often, sadly. He had given up work at 56 to enjoy an early retirement. Both avid campers and caravanners, they purchased a new Jayco van in the early stages of his cancer diagnosis. Don, ever the optimist, was determined to fight this cancer. For two and half years he endured many treatments, hospital visits and a bone marrow transplant but in February 2024 his body had enough, and he had to let go. We all lost a very special friend that day and Nicole lost her soul mate.

This melancholy story may be close to home. You might have your own 'Don' or know a 'Don'. You will miss that person as we miss Don, terribly. But there is more to this story. The couple discussed many things before he passed at age 62. One of them was about Nicole continuing to take the caravan out on solo trips. It was something she wanted, but the thought of 'flying solo' felt daunting. Don had always done the towing and the reversing into caravan spaces. "As many couples will tell you, the men often were the drivers," Nicole explained. "Once, when I mentioned to Don that I should learn how to tow the van, his response was, 'Oh you don't need to do that because you have me.'"

But that changed with the diagnosis. They knew Nicole would need to learn how to tow their van. She recoils at the memory of her first towing attempt. "It was on a skinny, winding road with a drop off and too many trucks. I was so scared I didn't want to tow anything after that." But if she wanted to fly solo, she had no choice, and a search on the RACQ website recommended Caravan Tuition Towing's towing courses.

"With Don getting weaker I had to know how to get home with the caravan," she said. They were taking short getaway trips to a Sunshine Coast caravan park for a few nights – close enough to the Brisbane hospital should he need to be admitted. "Up to that point I had never towed anything or backed the car onto the trailer – I was basically at zero."

Initially she thought of doing the towing course solo but suggested they do it as a couple. "Don said he didn't need any course because he knew everything about towing, but he came along and ended up learning a lot."

> “There were no courses 15 years ago, *but with caravanning becoming more popular people are looking for help*”

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Nicole releases the stabiliser legs with her trusty electric drill; Kerry’s 2005 Bailey van; Julie picking up her new square-drop van

LEARNING HOW TO TOW

Wayne McLeod worked in RACQ’s Driver Education Department for 20 years, managing the unit for the last five years. When RACQ closed the department in 2018, despite being close to retirement Wayne thought he’d continue working in an area he knew and loved. In 2019 he launched Caravan Towing Tuition. “When Covid arrived, the business grew a life of its own,” said Wayne. “There were no courses 15 years ago, but with caravanning becoming more popular people are looking for help.”

Caravan Towing Tuition offers courses across Brisbane, the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast, Logan, Ipswich, Toowoomba and surrounding areas. There is a course for someone who has upgraded their van and needs a refresher, or someone who has never towed a caravan. “If a new caravan has been delivered to a home, we meet at their house to discuss caravan basics and teach them how to hitch and unhitch. We then go out on the road together,” Wayne explained.

Wayne is convinced towing is 25 per cent skill and 75 per cent confidence. “If you find someone who can give you confidence, alert you to the pitfalls and point you in the right direction, you will be better off.” Wayne remembered a husband and wife who attended one of their courses. “The wife came under duress, but by the end of the course they were amazed. She drove home through the CBD on a Thursday afternoon in peak hour traffic. Because she found the confidence to do it.”

LEARNING TO LOVE SOLO TRAVELLING

Wayne has noticed an emerging trend among single females. “As single women retire many want to do more caravanning,” he said. “They are done with their careers, are comfortable in their own company and they don’t want to sit at home.”

Retired teacher Julie from Melbourne is single and knows if she waited for her family to come with her, she would still be sitting at home. Julie, in her 70s, loves travelling solo because she has freedom to do whatever she wants when she wants. “I feel the freest I have ever been in my life because I decide where I go. I don’t have a plan,” said Julie.

Julie’s caravan non-negotiables were for a comfortable bed, off the ground and solid walls around her. “A hard tent basically,” Julie said dryly. With her trusty Subaru Forester towing a teardrop van, Julie has driven across the Nullarbor and up the centre of Australia. She meets many women travelling on their own and has discovered groups with likeminded members. Julie helps run a Facebook group called, ‘Teardrop Travellers of Oz’. They share information and suggest places to meet up.

At the end of February Julie collected her new square-drop van in Brisbane and is slowly making her way home to Melbourne. Her van is so lightweight it can basically be pushed by hand. She manages without help, but that doesn’t stop some from trying. “I was at Somerset Dam, Qld, backing my van onto a site, when the man from the neighbouring site without asking reached into my car and grabbed my steering wheel,” she explained. “I quickly told him to remove his hand. I have found this is fairly typical behaviour by men who think a woman isn’t capable of reversing a van.”

ABOVE Another successful hitch for Nicole

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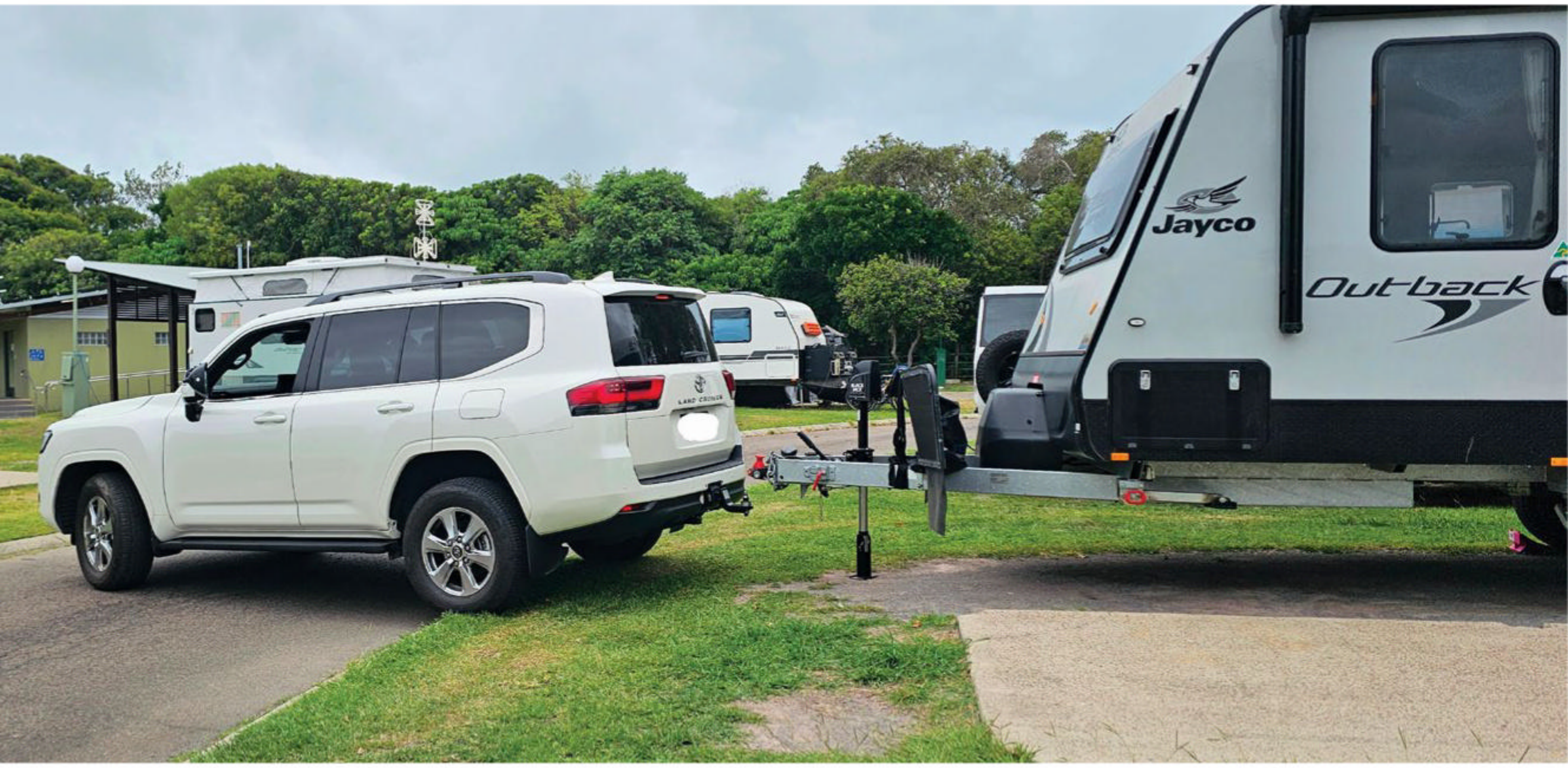
THE DAUNTING FIRST SOLO TRIP

Nicole grew up enjoying camping and boating. Her parents owned a caravan, and they planned on going on a Big Lap around Australia. But her father passed away suddenly when her mum was only 42. “Back then it was much harder for women to do things for themselves like I was thinking of doing after Don passed.” Nicole knew she would lose her confidence if she didn’t take the van out, and wanting to avoid feeling ‘trapped’ like her mum had in that different societal time. Her first solo trip was a three-hour drive south to northern New South Wales’ Broken Head Holiday Park. “My brother Pete lives down that way,” she said. “He suggested I come to a nearby caravan park, and he would help set me up.”

But the morning she was to leave Brisbane she couldn’t hitch the van onto the car. “After trying for 45 minutes, I got in the car, wound the windows up because I didn’t want the neighbours to hear and had a cry and a few screams. Because I don’t have the physical strength to use a jockey wheel on the tread hitch, I splurged on an electric Black Jack trailer jack. But this jack leaves no room for error – it has to be dead on to the tread hitch. And I was not on a flat surface, which wasn’t helping. I yelled out to Don in frustration, ‘If you want me to go away in this caravan you better let me get this damn caravan on.’ He must have heard, because I was successful the next attempt. I said, ‘Thank you Don.’”



ABOVE AND BELOW Nicole with her handy Multi-Reel hose by Flat Out International; Nicole reversing to hitch up the van using the Black Jack trailer jack

"I'd much prefer if a man asks if I would like any assistance first, rather than assume"

ABOVE Andree's Crusader Chameleon

"IT'S OK, I'VE GOT THIS"

Nicole is in her late 50s. "I look young enough to have a partner but too old to be single." At a few camp sites she has been asked where her partner is. "When I tell them, they often feel bad for asking."

When arriving at a caravan park in Pottsville, NSW, Nicole noticed that as she was backing her van a few men came out to watch. One guy ran up and asked if she wanted him to move his car, implying she would need more space. "If you feel you need to," she said back in reply.

"As a female, they underestimate you. I find it interesting. If the roles were reversed, and I had died and Don was on his own, he wouldn't ask for help or be offered help."

Kerry from Brisbane re-partnered many years after splitting with her husband. Alan was someone she had known for many years. When he asked her to join him on a caravan trip, she didn't hesitate to say yes. Sadly, only 12 months into their new relationship and caravaning fun, Alan was told he had inoperable, terminal cancer. A devastating blow to the couple. He was given six to 12 months, so they continued to travel. On an impulse Alan sold his Prado buying a Porsche Cayenne to tow his caravan. When Alan passed at age 69, Kerry inherited the car and van. When she realised servicing a European car was expensive, she sold the Porsche.

In September 2023, Kerry bought a small English caravan. When her father passed away in May the following year, her sister suggested they do a caravan road trip together to scatter their father's ashes in Port Fairy in southwestern Victoria. "My van is not as robust as ones made in Australia and on the way home it was damaged," Kerry said. She is currently waiting for her van to be fixed so she can hit the road again.

Like Julie and Nicole, Kerry is in her 60s and feels a bit indignant when a man comes over to give her advice or take charge. "I want to say, 'It's OK, I've got this.'" If she needs help, she will ask. "I'd much prefer if a man asks if I would like any assistance first, rather than assume. Because there are some tasks that are physically too demanding to do alone."

ABOVE Nicole and her Jayco set up at Coolum

> “With every trip Nicole’s confidence grows *and she is looking forward to many more holidays in the van”*

MODIFICATIONS THAT HELP

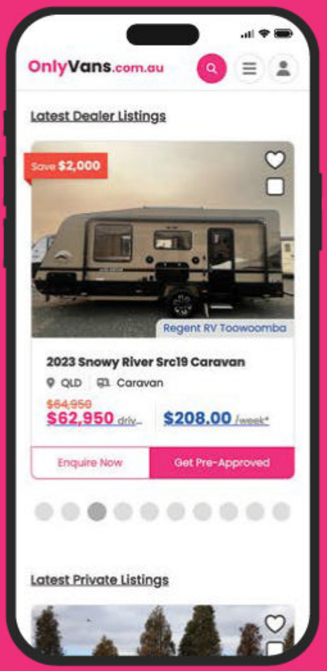
When it comes to safety, Andree from the Redlands in Greater Brisbane has a few tips for solo travellers. “Trust your instincts, if a place doesn’t feel right, move on,” she said. Andree has a Crusader Chameleon caravan with a few features that make her solo trips a little easier and more secure. “The Camec entry door is solid, with heavy glass plastic on the outside and security screen on the inside means I can keep the door open for ventilation,” Andree said. “The windows are also tinted for privacy and the triple-locking rear door gives extra peace of mind at night.”

Having a shower and toilet inside has been a game-changer for Andree as a solo traveller. “I don’t have to go outside in the middle of the night, and I can pull up anywhere without relying on campground facilities. Solo travel is all about finding that balance between adventure and feeling secure, and having the right setup makes all the difference.”

After that first trip to Broken Head Holiday Park, Nicole made a few changes to the gear she carried. “As a female solo caravanner I began looking at everything from an efficiency point of view.” She found a company selling flat hoses on a reel, the Multi-Reel by Flat Out International, a game changer when it comes to winding and unwinding her hose. At a caravan show Nicole saw a video featuring an awning by Shady Gear that uses Velcro to attach shade walls. Designed by a woman, this has made setting up so much quicker and easier. And she now has a power drill that makes erecting and dismantling the van legs a breeze.

With every trip Nicole’s confidence grows and she is looking forward to many more holidays in the van. “I have a lot more life to live.” At the time of recording the interview Nicole said, “One day I will take my grandson Mal with me, but it has to be the right time, because he is only two and might run away.” Six weeks later, I was up at Coolum Beach in Queensland taking photos of Nicole and the van. Grandson Mal had stayed with her for three nights! And they both survived just fine.

Solo travelling might feel daunting at first, but it’s also a great opportunity to learn new skills and experience a new kind of freedom. While there can be plenty of challenges when it comes to towing on your own, just take things one step at a time, focus on building your skills and confidence and remember to enjoy the ride.



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IN BRIEF

- Compact 13ft couples expedition hybrid with shower and toilet
- Under 1600kg tare with highly capable running gear
- Gasless off-grid power system

Words and Pics **JOHN HUGHES**

EXPEDITION READY

Tekton specialises in building bespoke caravans and hybrids to meet customers' every need and to be more than expedition ready.

TEKTON
SVX-4
TEKTON
EXPEDITION
TEKTON

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Light and nimble
- Expedition ready
- Highly customisable

CONS

- Some expedition-type travellers will be looking for more water tank capacity

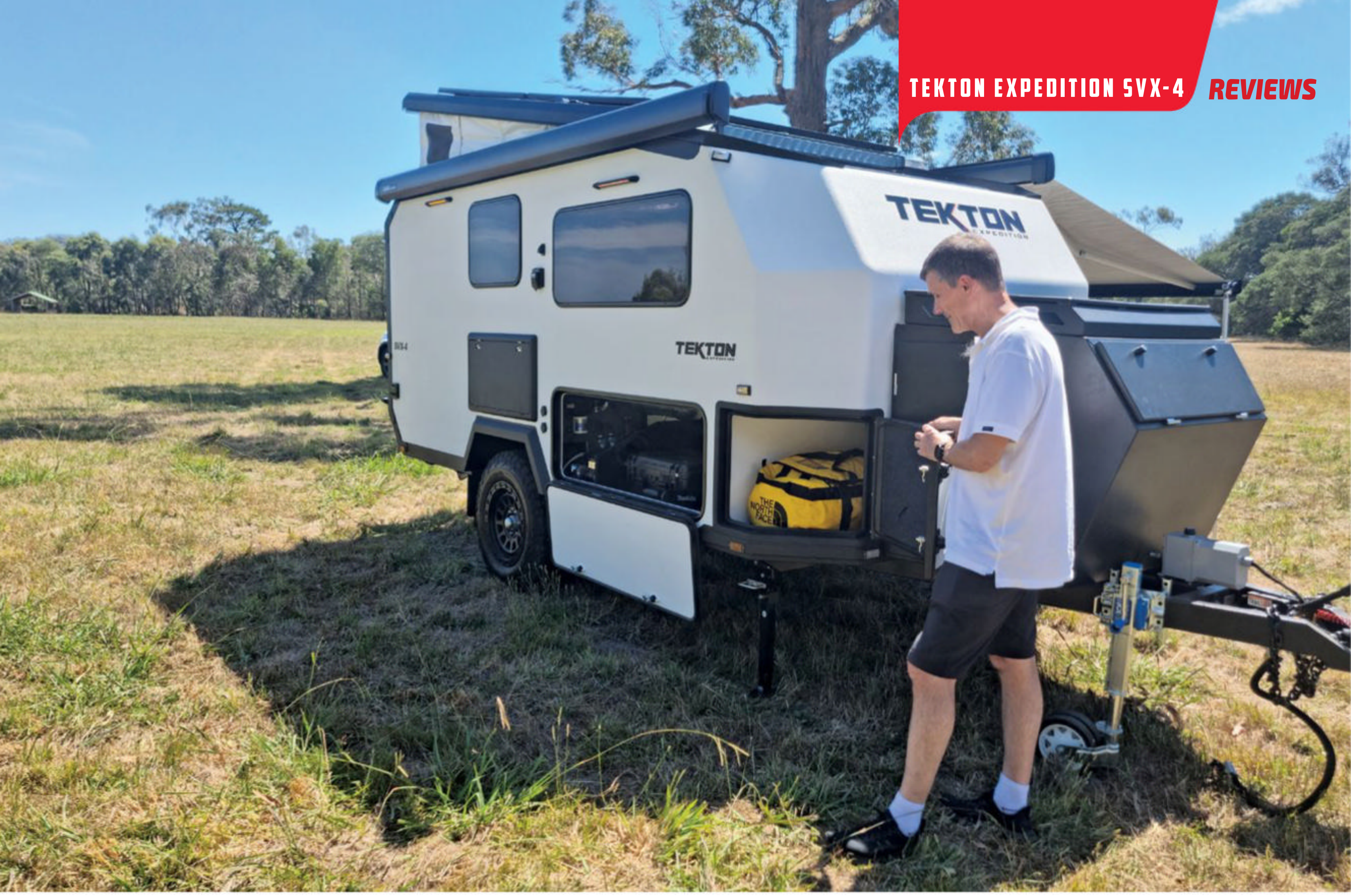
ABOVE AND BELOW It's a compact hybrid van ready for off-grid travel; Slide-out external kitchen

I come across many small-volume builders who produce about a hundred units a year. Established in 2017 and based in Boronia, Victoria, Tekton Expedition Vehicles is much more niche, building one or two units a month with an emphasis on one-of-a-kind vehicles tailored to customers' exact requirements.

WHO IS IT FOR?

The team at Tekton tells me its customers are generally highly experienced travellers who have owned multiple caravans and have a very clear idea of what they want from a van. The SVX-4 is pitched at couples who want to get well off the beaten track and value travelling light. They embrace the design philosophy of a compact footprint with an optimised interior.

Even though Tekton is a bespoke builder, it works off a handful of platforms as its starting point. The SVX-4 sits in the middle of the Tekton hierarchy, being a 13ft (4m) single axle hybrid-style van with side access external kitchen and a pop-top roof. The XT-3 compact pod-style camper is the baby of the range. It has a very low-profile fixed roof and rear external kitchen. It's the kind of set-up very much focused on external living where the interior is purely for sleeping or sitting in bed to read a book or watch a movie. The big brother of the range is the SVX-5, a full-height, twin-axle expedition-style caravan with an internal kitchen and bathroom. Tekton also plans to add a new platform by early 2026 that will sit between its SVX-4 and SVX-5.



ABOVE Storage up front

> "The SVX-4 sits in the middle of the Tekton hierarchy, being a 13ft (4m) single axle hybrid-style van *with side access external kitchen and a pop-top roof*"

HOW ARE THEY BUILT?

Cookie cutter is a term that is thrown around in the RV industry to describe building methods. This certainly does not apply to Tekton. Most caravan manufacturers construct their bodies on the chassis by adding a floor, then walls and finally a roof. Tekton uses composite panels (30mm thick with a foam core and fibreglass skin) like many other premium builders, but it builds its body standalone and then, once completed, secures it to the chassis.

The panels are used for the entire body including the floor, walls and roof. They are joined with fibreglassing techniques often used in the boating industry where watertightness is paramount. The surfaces are finished off with a urethane protective layer in a colour of the customer's choice and aluminium corner trim.

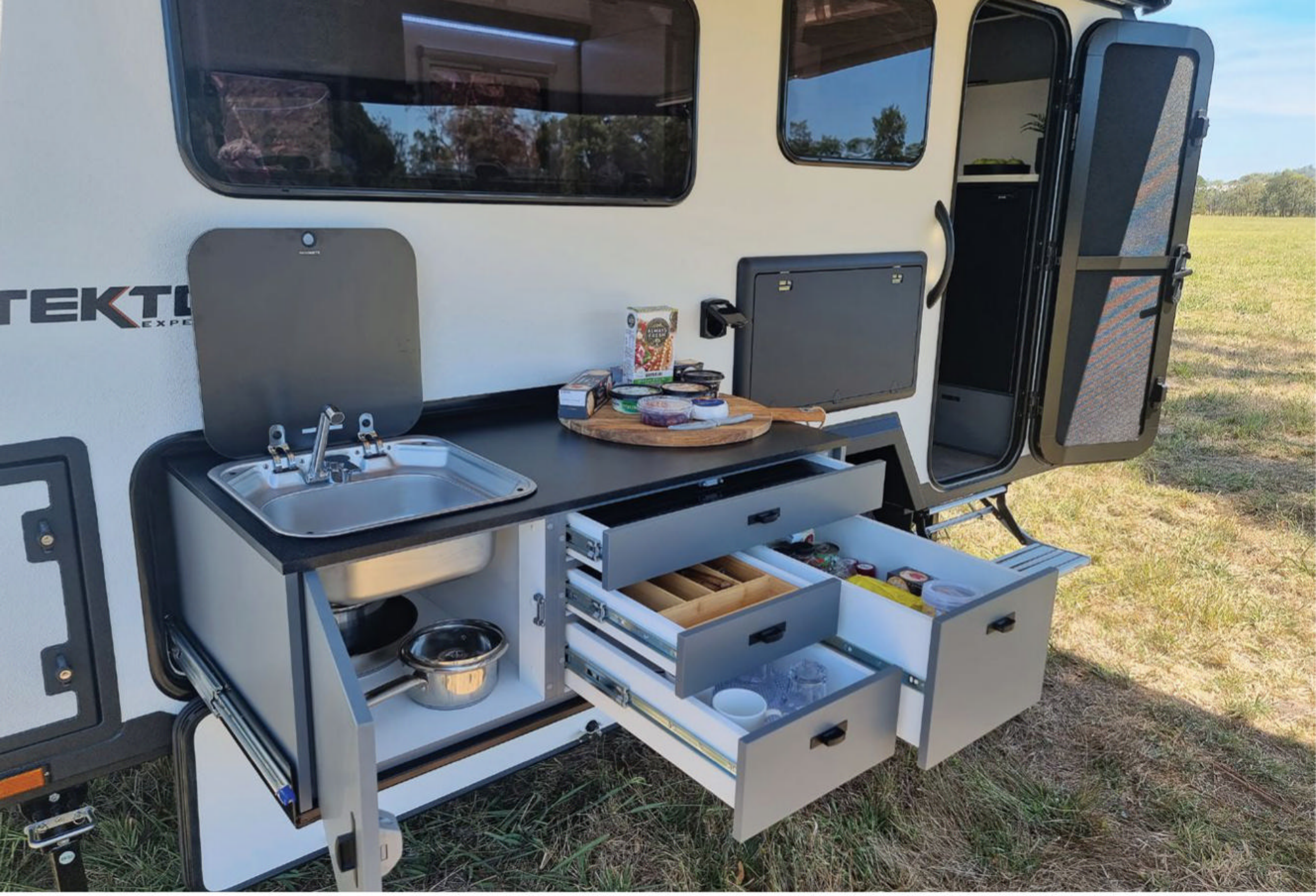
Securing the body to the chassis is a carefully managed process predominantly relying on high-strength adhesives used in the automotive and marine industries. The key to optimum bond strength is controlling the bead height of the adhesive. Tekton achieves this by placing rubber spacers at exactly the right height on top of the chassis at various points. It then runs adhesive on top of the chassis in between the rubber spacers. This means when the body is placed on top of the chassis more adhesive stays in place, rather than being forced out by the weight of the body. Locating bolts help position the body correctly on the chassis and secure the components while the adhesive reaches bond strength.

Tekton does its chassis' differently too. The A-frame beams continue right into the chassis, directly welded to the main beams and cross members. The A-frame has a third beam running right through the middle of it that continues into the chassis. This enables Tekton to use 100mm x 50mm sections of steel compared to the 150mm x 50mm beams you see on just about every other offroad van. (Tekton does use 150mm x 50mm A-frames on its larger SVX-5.) The upside of the shallower beam is it improves approach angle ground clearance. The downside is the middle beam running under the floor encroaches into space that could be otherwise used for an additional water tank.

The furniture is constructed from rot-free lightweight ABS composite material used in the marine industry and following the bespoke approach a yacht upholsterer is used for the finishing touches.

RUNNING GEAR

The SVX-4 rides on TEKO TuffRide independent airbag suspension, featuring trailing arms and four robust shock absorbers. The system allows a substantial 250mm of travel and is capable of remote control and auto-level ride height adjustment. Disc brakes have been used for this build and Tekton offers a choice of wheel stud pattern. Premium quality and readily available 265/70R17 BF Goodrich all-terrain tyres and 17in ROH Assault rims keep the van rolling.



ABOVE The wide slide-out kitchen design means the drawers and under-sink space are very easy to access

> *"The outdoor kitchen is one of the focal points of this van. Tekton has gone for materials that feel more like an interior kitchen* rather than all metal surfaces that often characterise hybrids and campers"

MINIMALIST INDOOR LIVING

We go caravanning for the outdoor experience but when the weather goes bad, or the bugs are eating us alive it is great to be able to retreat inside. This is my personal minimalist checklist for the interior functionality of a van. Is there somewhere to sleep? Can I stand up inside the van? Is there somewhere to sit at a table to eat a meal or use a laptop? Can I do some basic meal prep? Are there bathroom facilities when I really need them? The Tekton SVX-4 does all of this efficiently and without extravagance because that is the only way to do it in a 13ft van.

The extras on top of my minimalist checklist are an internal fridge. In this style of van, I am not fussed whether the fridge is inside or outside. The upside of the Bushman internal 130L compressor fridge is it is upright which makes it easy to see and access your food compared to the chest-style fridges usually included in external setups. The other upside is freeing up the external space for a pretty impressive kitchen/storage setup. The internal kitchen space works nicely too. There's reasonable bench space across the rear wall with a handy sink. If you were forced inside to cook it would be simple to move the portable induction cooker to get the job done. Below the benchtop is a good array of shallow and deep drawers and above the bench is a handy storage nook.

The customer has gone for a Trelino composting toilet which resides in the combination shower/toilet space at the rear of the van. Two waterproof hatches in the cubicle allow you to store toiletries and the alike.

The roof is hinged at the front end with hydraulic struts at the rear end which makes for a lightweight easy-to-operate set-up. It also means that full internal height is only achieved at the rear of the van. It's not a problem in such a compact van as there is nowhere to stand at the front of the van as the bed and adjacent storage take up all the space. It's also a narrow van meaning there would be limited space to walk along the sides of the north-south bed. Instead, the space is used with a row of storage hatches running down each side of the bed. The two underbed drawers offer more storage as does the compartment underneath one of the seats.

The balance of the under-bed space is dedicated to the Truma Saphir underbunk air-conditioning. Keeping the air-conditioner off the roof positions the centre of mass lower, frees up real estate for the large bank of solar panels and reduces potential leak points. Diesel heaters are a popular choice for staying warm while camping off-grid as it minimises the demand on your electrical supply. It's even better when the same Eberspacher combination unit also delivers the hot water for the van on demand.

TEKTON
EXPEDITION
SVX-4

ABOVE Pop-top roof and spare wheel on the rear of the van

OUTDOOR LIVING FOCUS

The outdoor kitchen is one of the focal points of this van. Tekton has gone for materials that feel more like an interior kitchen rather than all metal surfaces that often characterise hybrids and campers. I like the look, and the team tells me the ABS composite materials are highly weather-resistant if they get hit with a bit of rain. They have gone for a wide slide-out kitchen rather than a long slide-out kitchen. The result is the drawers and under-sink space feel very organised and easy to access. Another advantage of the kitchen not sticking out too far is it is well sheltered by the awning. A downside is the bench space is relatively limited, but it is well complemented by the fold-down table that is located right beside it.

A Thule wind-out awning rather than a roll-out awning has been selected as it is easy to use and less vulnerable to damage if it scrapes against some branches on a tricky track. In fact, the owners of the van like the awning so much that they have had one fitted on both sides. This makes it very easy for them to create shade or shelter from the rain across more weather conditions.

A large offside external hatch provides a decent amount of space for tools, chairs and the like along with some of the space being dedicated to an air compressor, water pump and diesel heater. Innovative corner hatches provide more utilitarian storage space. If you were pressed for clothes storage, you could always stow some of it here in a dry bag. A generous front toolbox augments storage including a useful top-mounted firewood tray.

TEKTON
EXPEDITION SVX-4

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Body length 4m (13ft 1in)
Overall length 5.36m (17ft 7in)
Width 2.1m (6ft 9in)
Height 2.45m (8ft 1in)
Tare 1595kg
ATM 2800kg
Payload 1205kg (calculated)
Ball weight at tare 90kg
Ball to tare ratio 5.6% (calculated)

EXTERNAL

Frame Frameless
Cladding Fibreglass composite panel monocoque construction body including walls, floor and roof
Chassis Tekton unique one-piece chassis design with integrated A-frame and sealed main chassis rails
Suspension Modified TEKO TuffRide independent airbag system
Coupling Cruisemaster DO35
Brakes Electric/hydraulic disc brakes
Wheels 265/70R17 BF Goodrich all-terrain with 17in ROH Assault rims
Water 2 x 110L freshwater, 1 x 50L grey water
Battery 700Ah TEKTON EV type: lithium-ion phosphate
Inverter 3000W
Solar 880W monocrystalline twin-cell panels
Air-conditioner Truma Saphir underbunk 2.4kW
Gas N/A
Sway control N/A

INTERNAL

Cooking Westinghouse portable twin-plate induction cooktop
Microwave N/A
Fridge Bushman 130L compressor
Bathroom Combo ensuite with Trelino composting toilet
Hot water Eberspacher diesel hot water and integrated heating system

PRICE FROM $142,500

OPTIONS FITTED

- Electric/hydraulic disc brakes
- Additional 3.5m awning
- STEDI STX-50 light bar — roof-mounted
- Truma Saphir underbunk air-conditioning reverse cycle
- 700Ah lithium battery upgrade
- 880W twin cell monocrystalline solar panels upgrade
- Reverse camera
- Additional body-mounted picnic table with LED light

PRICE AS SHOWN $162,350

MORE INFORMATION
Tekton Expedition Vehicles
P: 0468 899 103
W: tektonev.com.au

ON
OFF
AIR COMP
AIR
OUT
LEFT
RIGHT
TEKO
TUFFRIDE

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE TEKO TuffRide suspension; Basic interior kitchen with Bushman 130L fridge; Plenty of power for off-grid camping

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
This is a high-end van that lives up to its premium price tag

TOWABILITY
The SVX-4 does everything right to tow well in rugged conditions. It's lightweight, short and narrow

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
It ticks the boxes for those seeking minimalist expedition touring

BUILD QUALITY
Tekton takes a meticulous approach to build quality, and it shows

LIVEABILITY
If you see the van interior as a place to do the essentials and the exterior to do the living then this van will work for you

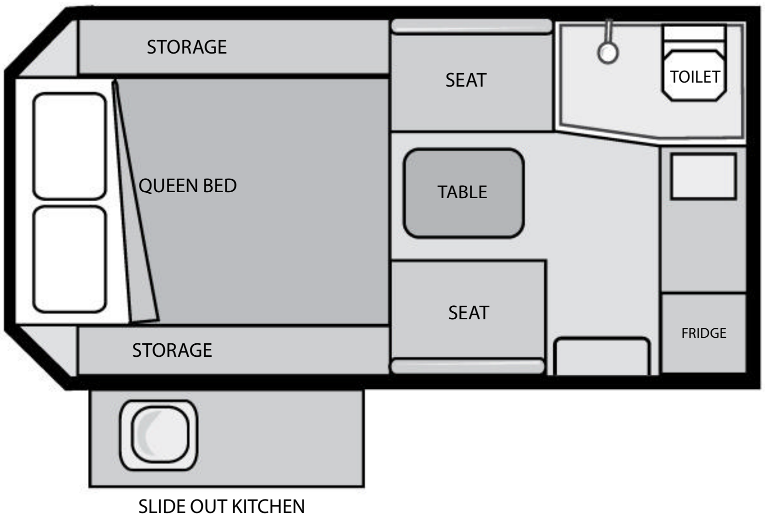
SELF SUFFICIENCY
Packs plenty of electrical punch and carries a decent load of water for a little van

CUSTOMER CARE
Five-year warranty on chassis, suspension and body

INNOVATION
Tekton stands out from the crowd with a very different monocoque body manufacturing technique

X-FACTOR
You can make a Tekton into just about anything you want if you have the budget

> "Tekton is an early adopter of Garmin tech in the RV industry *collaborating on integrated control systems*"

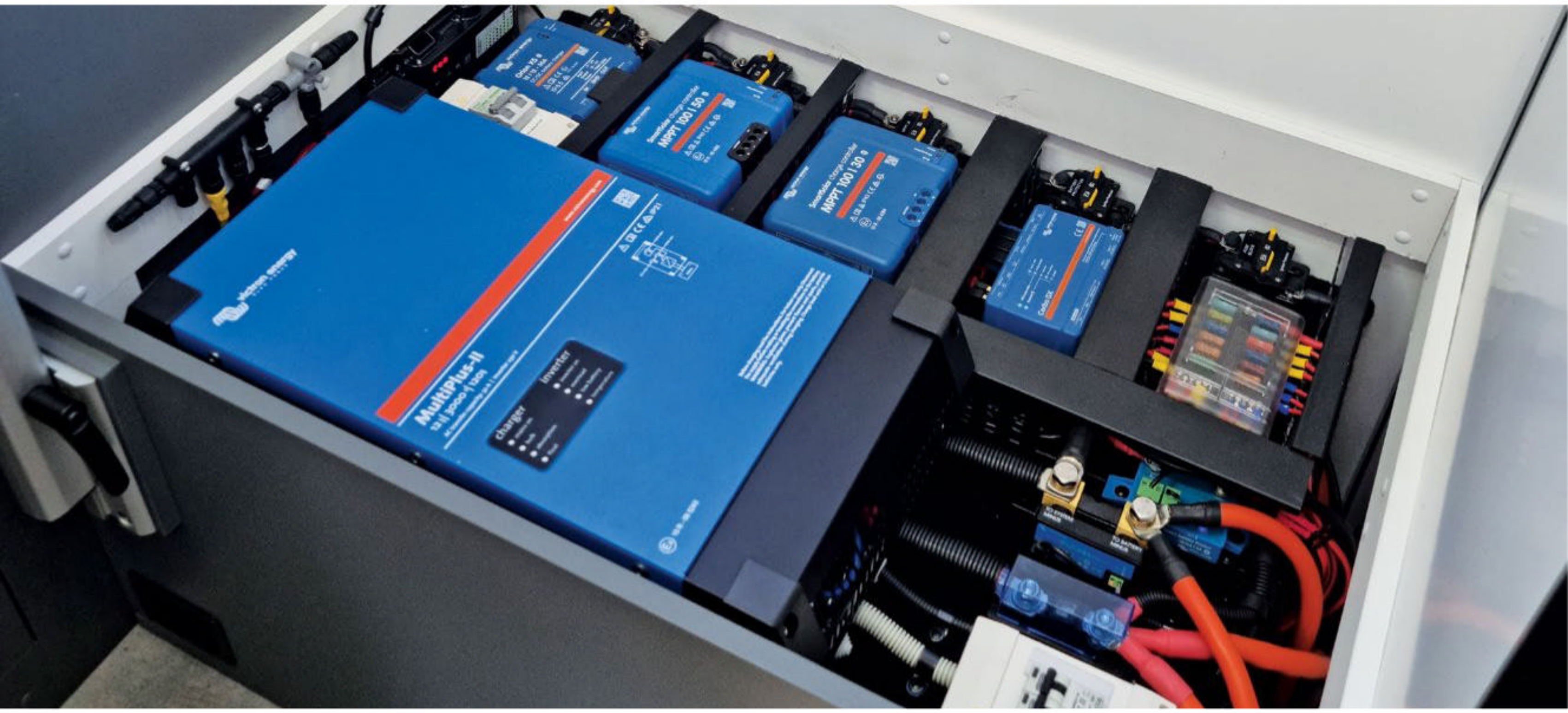


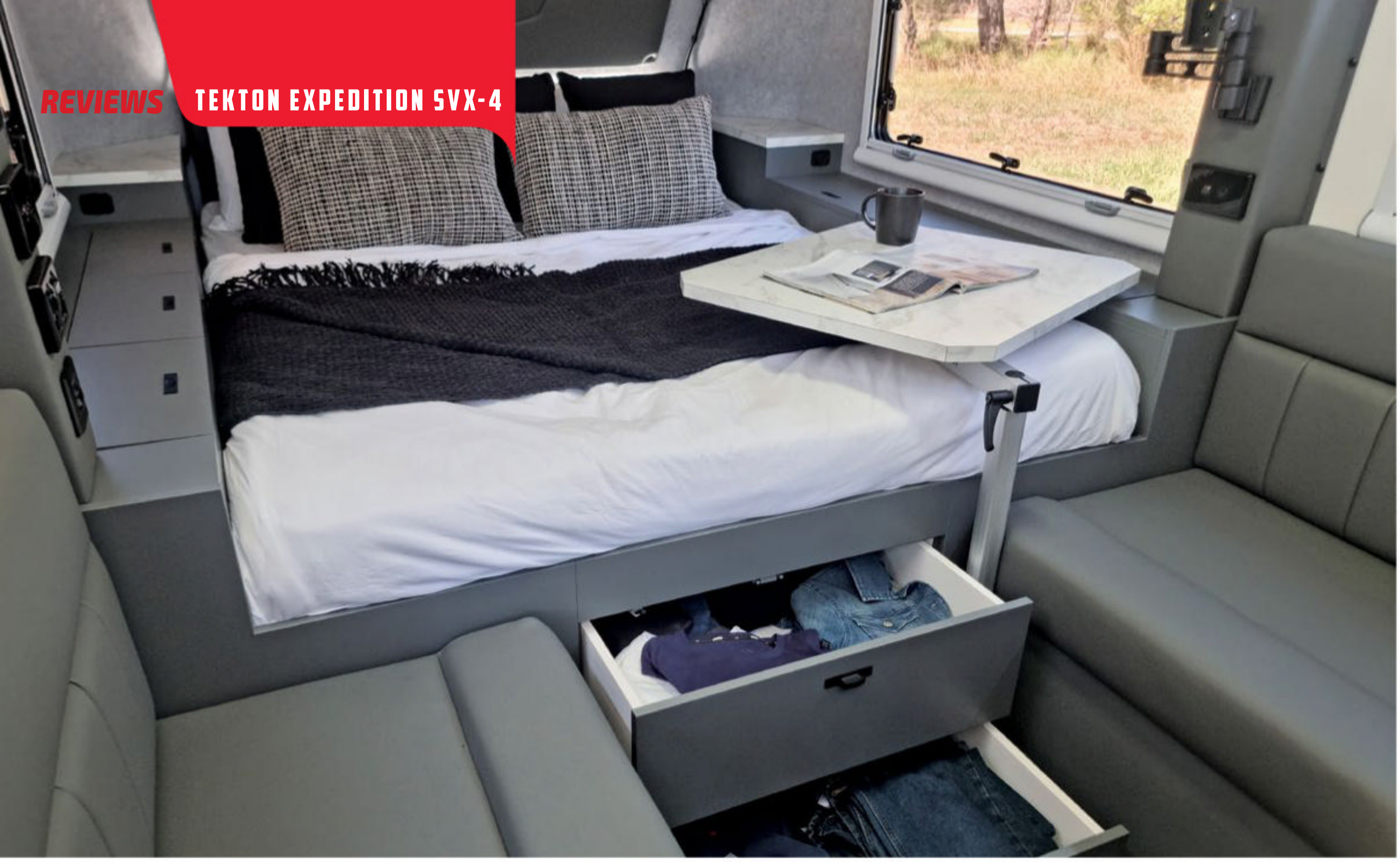
ROUGHING IT

Off-grid capability abounds with the Victron system which allows Tekton to do away with gas completely. It has plenty of capacity to capture, store and deliver power. Power input is taken care of with 880W monocrystalline twin-cell solar panels working with a 50A solar controller and 50A DC to DC charger. An additional 30A controller feeds into the system so you can use a solar blanket too. The system is smart enough to take on power from multiple sources simultaneously when required. A 700Ah lithium battery system holds a lot of juice and a 3000W inverter is capable of delivering substantial 240V power to run this van with relatively modest power requirements.

Tekton is an early adopter of Garmin tech in the RV industry collaborating on integrated control systems. Functionality includes controlling the air-con, hot water/heater, airbag system water pump and lights plus monitoring the power system status.

Some 220L of freshwater storage is as much as you get on many vans twice the size. Expanding that water capacity is challenging on a 13ft van because there is very limited real estate to fit more tanks underneath. For the same reason, grey water capacity is limited to 50L. Water capacity can be supplemented with jerry cans in the front toolbox and some customers have opted to fit slimline jerry cans on the rear bar underneath the spare wheel. This keeps weight low but does compromise the departure angle somewhat.





> *"To accommodate a lower-rated tow vehicle, the Tekton could be re-rated with a 2500kg ATM, for example,* and still have adequate payload"

TOWABILITY

This is a light van (1595kg tare) for a robustly built offroader with a few extra goodies – a base build can be as light as 1480kg. An ATM of 2800kg delivers a payload of 1205kg. However, I doubt that would rarely be fully used simply because there isn't enough room to store that much stuff. To accommodate a lower-rated tow vehicle, the Tekton could be re-rated with a 2500kg ATM, for example, and still have adequate payload. It's also narrow, short and low which are all highly desirable attributes for getting vans in and out of tight spots.

The Land Rover Defender tow vehicle and Tekton both had airbags which meant it was possible to raise the rig body ride heights to make it easier to negotiate more challenging terrain. It is nice to be able to keep your centre of mass as low as possible and only raise it when you need to for slow-going stuff.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Tekton is a niche custom builder which stakes its reputation on delivering exactly what the customer wants. The SVX-4 hybrid van reviewed is an example of an extremely well-executed compact, lightweight expedition vehicle for a customer who wants a high-performance off-grid setup focusing on a minimalist approach.

TEKTON
DEFENDER

ABOVE AND BELOW Plenty of storage around the north–south bed; Tow testing the SVX-4 with a Land Rover Defender

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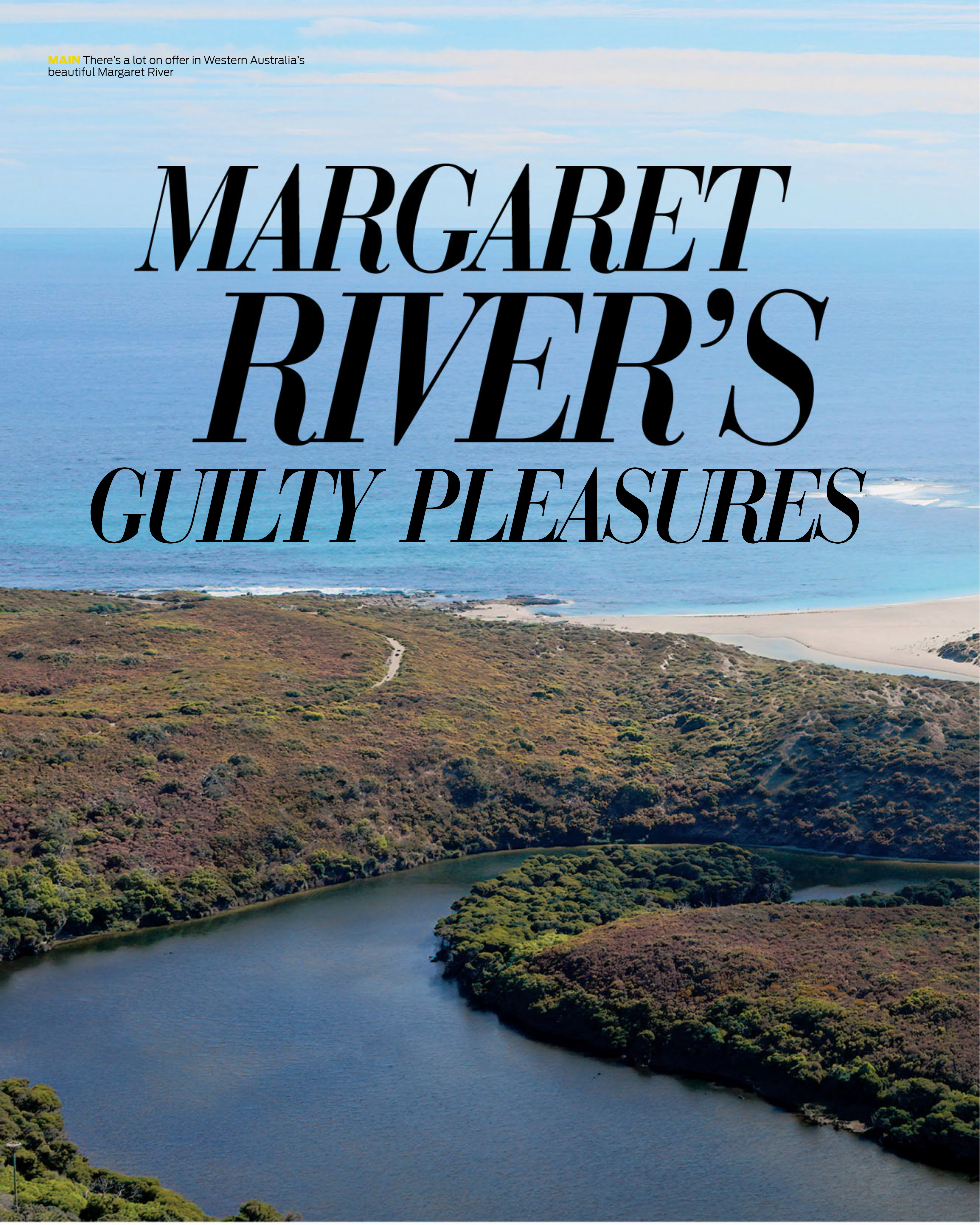
MARGARET RIVER'S GUILTY PLEASURES



MAIN There's a lot on offer in Western Australia's beautiful Margaret River

Western Australia's southwest region has a lot on offer — desired for its brochure-perfect beaches, world-class surf breaks, nature trails, delectable dining options, breweries, distilleries and wine … a lot of it.

Words and Pics
JULIA D'ORAZIO

"There are plenty of options to indulge in what the Margaret River region does best – wine and good food"

ABOVE AND BELOW Bussell Highway runs through Margaret River; Feeding the animals at Discovery Parks – Margaret River

With the new Wilman Wadandi Highway bypassing Bunbury and shaving 20 minutes of travelling time, access to WA's southern corner has never been more convenient for a weekend getaway. From Perth, it's a three-hour drive to the heart of Margaret River.

Now, where to start spoiling myself?

A BASE POINT

My partner and I booked into Discovery Parks - Margaret River. Located along Bussell Highway, it's a good location to base yourself for exploring WA's renowned wine country. The caravan park is 18km (15 minutes) north of Margaret River town and just minutes from the small and eclectic town of Cowaramup, 5km south.

We were in for a treat with the countryside caravan park doubling as a farm stay. The park's cabins and undulating campgrounds face charming green farmlands and dams. Tuart trees tower over sizable unpowered and powered sites, providing ample shade across its 88 campsites. Powered sites five to eight are best for farm views.

Young ones will also be fans of the park. Besides exerting energy on a jumping pillow, kids can participate in the park's daily animal feeding sessions at 4.30pm featuring camels, pigs, cows and goats.

NOTHING SHORT OF INDULGENCE

Speaking of feeding time, there are plenty of options to indulge in what the Margaret River region does best – wine and good food – and that is what these few days in the region are all about.

ABOVE AND BELOW Discovery Parks – Margaret River has a great range of campsites; Lunch at Swings and Roundabouts

A favourite vineyard is Yallingup's Swings and Roundabouts, 21km northwest of the caravan park. It is located along one of the state's most scenic drives, Caves Road, the inland road stretching between the region's iconic capes, Naturaliste (north) and Leeuwin (south). The popular vineyard is one of many dotted along the two-lane road, mostly fringed by towering jarrah, karri and marri forests, vineyards and secreted caves (hence the name).

After conducting tastings in the cellar door, we headed outside to take advantage of the good weather and playful setting. The communal long table overlooking the vineyard, with swings replacing chairs, is a novelty. Understandably, these chairs are hot property, and it's best to get in early to swing and sip. Still, there are plenty of tables and sun lounges to contentedly soak in the scene with a glass in hand.

We perched ourselves near the pop-up bar out on the paddock. It was Friday afternoon, and the winery was already in weekend mode. A DJ played on a mixing desk under soaring gums, many clinking wine glasses to upbeat French boogie music. Two kookaburras quickly darted in front of us, their small, slender grey bodies adding a flash of colour to a delightful backdrop of rolling green hills and clear blue skies.

It's easy to linger here for a few hours (and we did), sipping chardonnay and gorging with huge woodfired pizzas. There's no short-changing with toppings either with the 'Bomba' pizza heaped with chorizo and garlic-marinated prawns. Not a bad way to spend the afternoon.

> *"Cosy or expansive sandy stretches, world-class surf breaks, and rocky coastline – the region could be forgiven for causing decision paralysis on where to take the plunge"*

ABOVE Gracetown Beach, Cowaramup Bay

MORNINGS DONE RIGHT

There are no shortages of pristine beaches in WA's southwest. Cosy or expansive sandy stretches, world-class surf breaks, and rocky coastline – the region could be forgiven for causing decision paralysis on where to take the plunge. While Meelup Beach, Bunker Bay and Eagle Bay are famed coastal hotspots, the lesser-known beaches deserve a visit too.

The closest beach to the caravan park is Gracetown Beach, 18km west. Located in namesake Gracetown, the rugged beach is bordered by a hill and two sought-after surf breaks, North and South Point in Cowaramup Bay. After a dip between the two breaks, we headed to check out surfers in action at exposed reef break 'Huzzawouie', affectionately known as 'Huzzas'. A handful of surfers were taking advantage of the morning swell, and we watched from the steep lookout. The spot is along the Cape to Cape Track – one of the country's most scenic long-distance trails. Clearly, there are many ways to get active in Gracetown.

The nucleus of the tight-knit town is Gracies General. The general store is a hive of activity in the mornings; it lures locals by combining the flavours of Margaret River Bakery and Augusta Bakery under one roof, as well as selling coffee, drinks and local wares. We grabbed a pie and perched ourselves along the wooden communal bench seating overlooking Cowaramup Bay and a lone petrol pump. A stunning, low-key way to start the day.

RIGHT AND BELOW Bushtucker River and Wine Tours canoe tour along Margaret River; Entrance to Huzzas surf break in Gracetown

PADDLING OUT

From Gracies General, it's a 19km drive south to Margaret River township. However, before stepping foot in town, we kept to the water.

Instead of beach hopping, we headed to the river mouth at Prevelly Beach to explore Margaret River, known as Wooditjup Bilya (the creator's river) by the Wadandi Traditional Owners. Locally owned and operated, Bushtucker River and Wine Tours has been running canoe trips for 35 years, with tours that are not your stock standard paddle.

We were on a half-day tour with 10 adults, a mix of local and international tourists in two five-seater canoes. At the helm was an English tour guide, Adam, leading the journey, canoeing through mangroves before entering the dramatic river valley. As we paddled past soaring crags and dense paperbark tree forests, Adam delved into the region's history, both Indigenous and colonial, pointing out sacred sites and the charred remains of one of the region's first pioneers, the Bussell family's 19th-century home. All that stands from the aftermath of the devastating 2011 Prevelly wildfires is a chimney seen from the riverbanks.

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RIGHT Gin tastings at Limeburners and Giniversity Margaret River

FAST FACTS

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W: discoveryholidayparks.com.au

Bushtucker River & Wine Tours
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W: bushtuckertours.com

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Swings and Roundabouts
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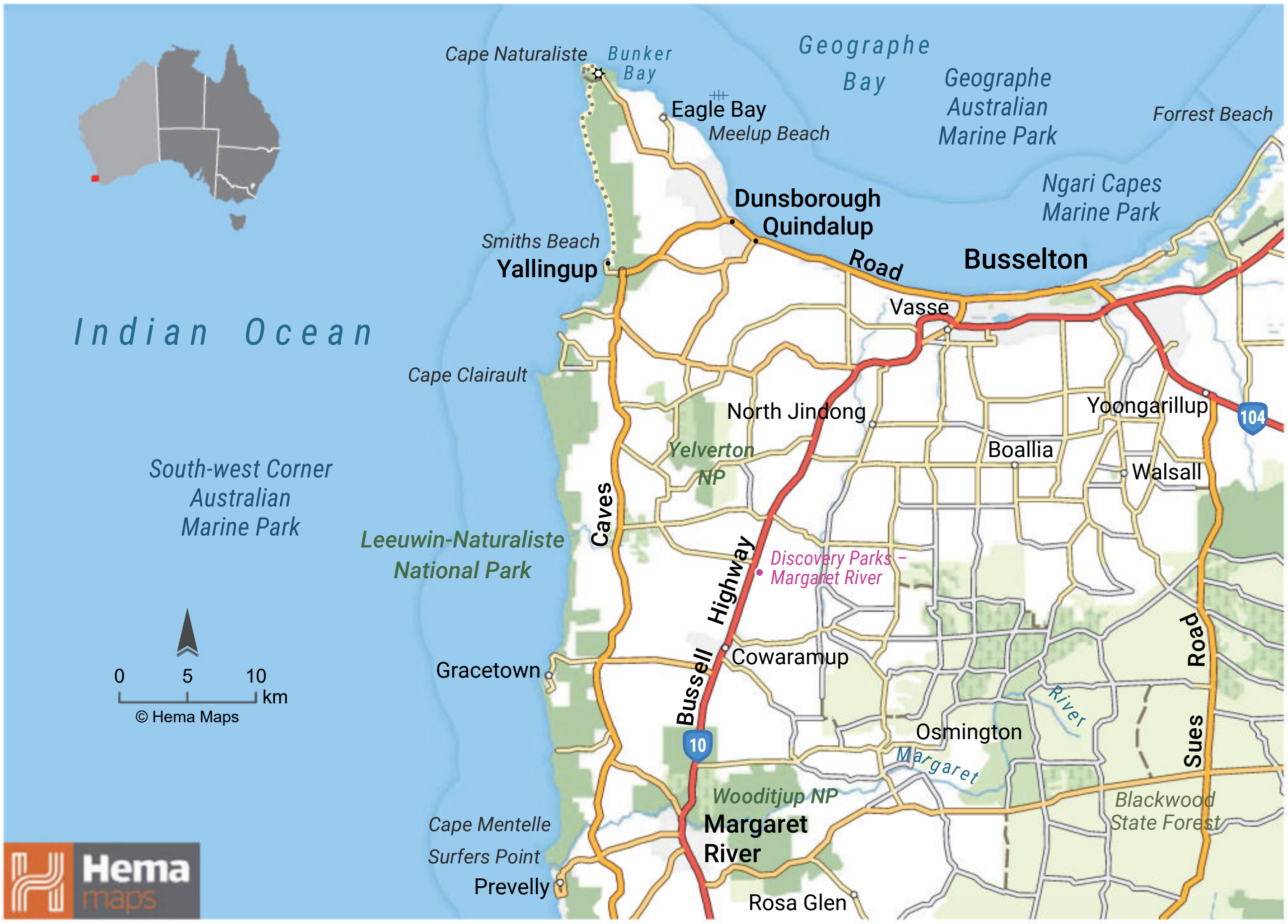
Cape Naturaliste
Bunker Bay
Geographe Bay
Geographe Australian Marine Park
Forrest Beach
Eagle Bay
Meelup Beach
Dunsborough
Quindalup
Ngari Capes Marine Park
Road
Busselton
Smiths Beach
Yallingup
Vasse
Indian Ocean
Cape Clairault
North Jindong
Yoongarillup
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Yelverton NP
Boallia
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Caves
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"Many partake in this canoeing adventure for its legendary bushtucker feast in the bush"

ABOVE AND BELOW Bushtucker tour along Margaret River; A beautifully presented bushtucker feast

Motor craft are not permitted along this portion of the river, so we saw a side of Margaret River which few glimpse. We pulled up by a jumble of rocks along the river to have a playful splash before making our most important stop of the day: lunch.

Many partake in this canoeing adventure for its legendary bushtucker feast in the bush. Adam's picnic basket contained a smorgasbord inspired by the Aussie outback: Bush tomatoes, quandong fruit leather straps made by Bushtucker River and Wine Tours founder Helen Lee, desert oak 'native dukkha', green pesto coastal spinach with lemon myrtle, chutneys, pink finger limes, rosella flowers to name a few of the 20 native tastings.

"Here we have the contents of a Louis Vuitton bag," Adam joked as he put a container of crocodile strips alongside emu and kangaroo on the makeshift table – a bread tray covered with a tablecloth featuring Indigenous art. This feast is like no other; I doubt many would attempt to replicate it for their next picnic. It was unique and, most importantly, delicious. A tasty reward after the workout upstream.

Tasting of native ingredients continued at Limeburners and Giniversity Margaret River. The region's oldest and award-winning craft gin distillery is nestled under peppermint trees just minutes from Margaret River town. It would appease gin lovers with a wide range of unique gin concoctions. We enjoy nips of gins infused with black truffles (sourced from Manijmup) and botanicals. There's even a sriracha gin on offer; the adventurous tastings continue.

Welcome to our Market
Mario's Gard

"The Mediterranean-inspired Rústico at Hay Shed Hill in Wilyabrup is renowned for its degustation-style tapas and slow lunches overlooking vines"

A QUICK TRIP TO SPAIN

Quite different from bushtucker feasts is a quick trip to Spain sans passport. The Mediterranean-inspired Rústico at Hay Shed Hill in Wilyabrup is renowned for its degustation-style tapas and slow lunches overlooking vines.

Showcasing the best seasonal produce with Med-flair, the well-priced five-course menu starts from $85 (not including wine pairings). Because this trip hadn't been filled with enough indulgence, I had no qualms about ordering an extra tapa – a bite-size crumpet topped with thick chunks of western rock lobster and champagne hollandaise ($7). I'd reached peak satisfaction.

WHILE YOU'RE THERE, DON'T FORGET ...

Margaret River Farmers' Markets

The much-loved community event is held every Saturday all year around from 7.30-11.30am at Margaret River Education Campus. It is the perfect place to meet with local producers and mingle with locals.

Margaret River Region Open Studios

Australia's largest open studios event, Margaret River Region Open Studios, invites the public to be inspired by creative hubs and hidden spaces across the region. See artists in action, working on their next masterpiece, from pottery to paintwork. The event runs from 13-28 September 2025.

Traditional Owners

Margaret River is in central Wadandi Boodja, with the Wadandi people the region's Traditional Custodians.

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Rústico at Hay Shed Hill; Margaret River Farmers' Market; Discovery Parks – Margaret River; Dining at Rústico at Hay Shed Hill

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STAY OFF-GRID LONGER WITH AUSTRALIAN RV ACCESSORIES

ABOVE Australian RV Accessories has a wide range of innovative products, including a flexible solar awning

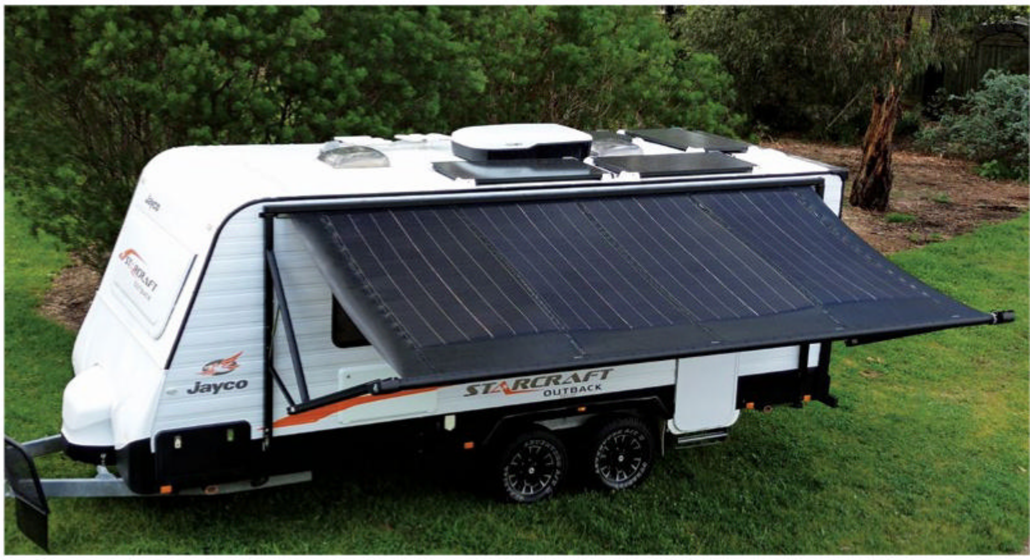
Australian RV Accessories is one of Australia's leading brands in the caravan and motorhome accessory market, and its new flexible solar caravan awning means that running out of power during off-grid stays is a thing of the past.

Words Editorial Team Pics Supplied

As caravan parks grow busier, it's becoming more popular for Aussie adventurers to seek out longer off-grid stays in national parks or on remote beaches. And caravans that are set up to handle these extended off-grid stays are becoming the new standard.

Founded by Rod Francis in 2004, Australian RV Accessories offers reliable, innovative energy solutions and RV products to ensure your dream of endless exploration in the remote outback can become a reality.

Among its innovative range, which is setting new standards in the industry, is the solar awning which enables caravans to embark on longer adventures to remote off-grid destinations.



LA
LUXURY
AWNINGS
By GOLDEN SOLAR

ABOVE AND BELOW Expand your caravan's power bank with the flexible solar awning; An innovative product perfect for off-grid camping

FLEXIBLE SOLAR AWNING

The Australian RV solar awning comes in two sizes. The 12ft (10.9m) version delivers 850W of power and the 16ft (14.6m) version a total of 1050W which it can sustain for hours.

Featuring cutting-edge HBC technology, the awnings are engineered to thrive in Australia's harsh and demanding environments. The durable solar cells are designed to withstand wind, rain and intense heat while maintaining peak performance, ensuring years of reliable energy.

Richard Flanders from Australian RV said unlike traditional panels, the solar cells resist efficiency losses in high temperatures, providing consistent power even on the hottest days.

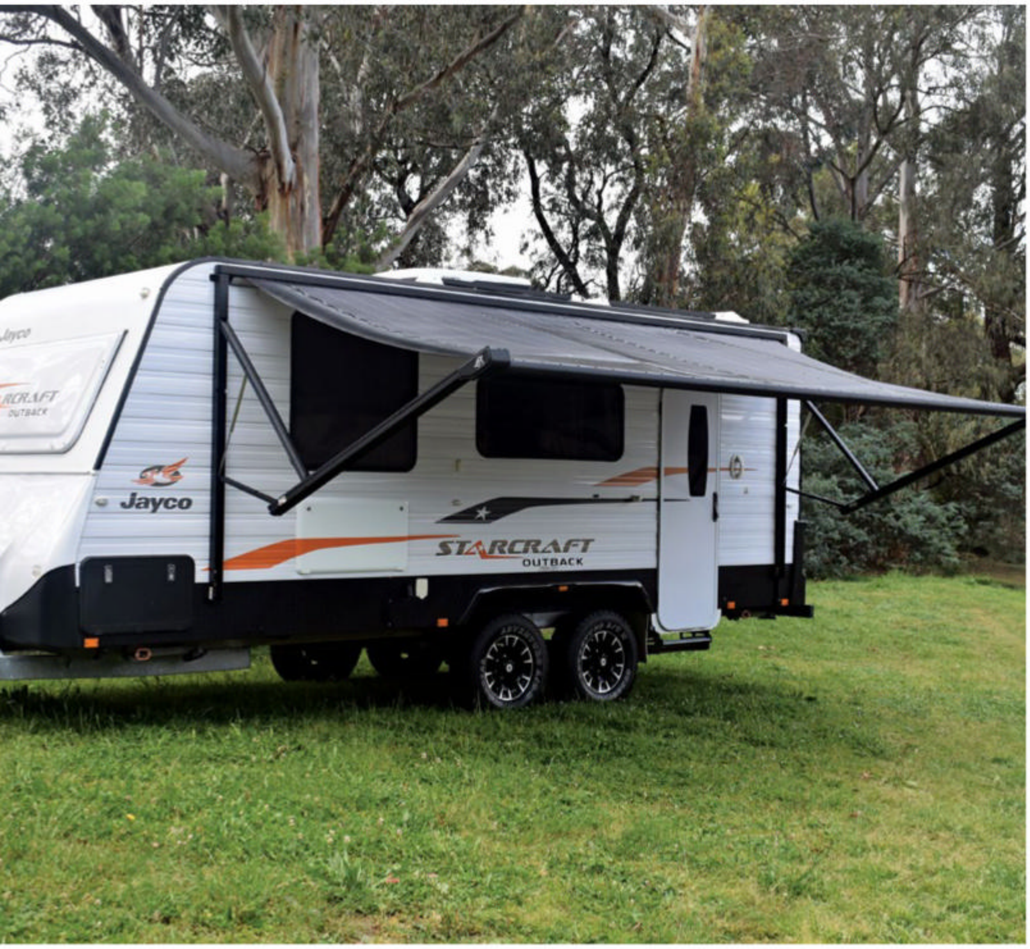
"With all electrical contacts hidden on the back, they maximise sunlight absorption and perform well even in low light," said Richard "Flexible and sleek, they seamlessly integrate with the awning's design, delivering stylish, efficient and long-lasting energy for your outdoor adventures."

The solar cells are equipped with an advanced omnidirectional layer that helps capture sunlight from all angles, ensuring optimal performance even when the sun is at a low angle. This means you don't have to worry about where you park, as the awning continues to generate power efficiently in varying light conditions.

"We regularly see the awning producing 100 to 400W in full overcast weather," said Richard.

"Built to withstand tough Aussie conditions, Australian RV has roll tested the solar awning *up to 10,000 times during a 10-day expedition in northeast Victoria*"

Jayco
STARCRAFT
OUTBACK



ABOVE AND BELOW Setup is easy; The awning features automatic wind detection

Why is the awning so good?

First and foremost, the solar awning preserves valuable roof space on your caravan so that space can be used for luxuries such as skylights, air conditioning units, dust reduction systems and fixed Starlink satellites.

Additionally, the solar produced by the awning will offset the high energy demand of air conditioners, enabling efficient cooling during the hottest parts of the day while maintaining battery life for extended off-grid adventures. In short, you'll worry less about how long you can stay off-grid.

Built to withstand tough Aussie conditions, Australian RV has roll tested the awning up to 10,000 times during the manufacturing process. Extended expeditions are also used to for testing corrugation impacts and solar outputs, including a 10-day expedition in northeast Victoria and a trip the team is currently undertaking a run up the Stuart Highway from Port Augusta in South Australia to Darwin in the Northern Territory.

How does it work?

The state-of-the-art electric awning has a remote control and switch panel as well as automatic wind detection, which can be turned off. There is also a manual override, so you can retain control if needed.

Due to the power produced by the awnings, the nominal voltage of the 16ft version is 95V. This requires the awning to have its own regulator feeding into any battery system. Australian RV recommends a Victron SmartSolar MPPT, which it has tested, however any regulator designed for high voltage will work.

Once the solar regulator is installed, the setup mirrors that of a standard high-current solar panel, delivering around 88A on a 12V system.

Maintenance is similar to that of an electric awning and a solar panel combined. Regular cleaning is essential to remove dust buildup that can impact performance and a centre awning support is recommended, especially when driving on rough, corrugated roads.

The design of the awning incorporates fused cells. If, in the unfortunate event the panels get damaged, a fuse will trip for your safety and to protect the battery system. The Australian RV support team is always available for assistances our support team for assistance with replacements and repairs.

The 16ft solar awning weighs approximately 77kg and the 12ft weighs 63kg, and both come with a three-year warranty.

If you enjoy some DIY, you can install the awning yourself (having two people is advised), but Richard did note that because of the wiring required, it's recommended to get the awning professionally installed for extra peace of mind.

MANAGE YOUR POWER

Australian RV is an official distributor for Victron Energy in Australia and when it comes to other great off-grid power solutions, Richard recommends a Cerbo GX Controller from Victron. Not keeping track of power usage is one of the common pitfalls during off-grid camping, particularly for newcomers. The Cerbo GX Controller can help with this; featuring a large LED screen it can connect to all your caravan's technical systems allowing for a quick glance to understand exactly what's happening.

This also allows for remote troubleshooting – should anything go wrong when you're out in the bush, a technician can dial in and diagnosis or fix the problem remotely.

HEAD OFF-GRID WITH AUSTRALIAN RV

For further information about the new solar awning or other products to extend your off-grid stays, give Australian RV a call on 03 9758 1761 or visit the website for your nearest distributor: austrv.com.au

ABOVE AND BELOW A solar awning will free up your van's roof for other accessories or simply expand your solar setup; It works just like a regular awning

THE MAGIC TOUCH

Words
JOHN FORD

RANGE
VIC AJE

Sunshine Coast builder Sunseeker Caravans has adopted composite construction and brought new designs and layouts to its range. We delve into the new Merlin 20'6 to see if the magic has transitioned to the new models.

***Pics** John Ford and supplied*

SUNSEEKER
CARAVANS
MERLI
ROVER
686

IN BRIEF

- Composite construction
- Roomy couples offroader
- Standard equipment for off-grid living

Chris Michel, owner of the Sunseeker Caravans and Vision RV brands on the Queensland Sunshine Coast, is passionate about modernising the Australian caravan industry. We met in Ballarat at his new Victorian outlet to unveil his latest project, a composite construction couples van, the magically named Merlin. Like the van, Chris likes to pull surprises, and his latest van has a remarkable list of standard features set to attract new buyers.

RETHINKING OFFROAD CARAVANS

Sunseeker introduced its first van in 2015 when Chris transitioned from the automotive industry to establish his own brand of caravans. Initially, he partnered with Melbourne builders for the offroad Sunseeker brand and a more budget conscious Marvel version. As the business grew, his passion became designing better vans for Australian conditions. He took to the caravanning lifestyle with glee and seemed to be forever pushing boundaries and testing his latest ideas in as harsh conditions as he could find. I pity the poor LandCruiser mechanics trying to fix the battered vehicles after many of his trips into the wilds.

MEASURING UP

PROS

- Sturdy composite build
- Sensible ATM for versatile towing options
- Couples will enjoy the room and ambience

CONS

- I'd option on the composting toilet

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT A stoneguard protects the twin gas bottles; Trailing arm suspension with Pedders shocks; Good off-grid capacity with 880W solar capacity; White colour scheme keeps it cool

Five years ago, he delivered the first hybrid production Vision RV – importing the bodies and fitting them out in his Coolum Beach factory in Queensland. With his experience building around 400 Visions and his knowledge of computer design, he became eager for a new venture, and the stars aligned for him to manufacture the new Sunseekers in a dedicated Brisbane factory.

According to Chris, the industry needs to abandon old-school thinking of relying on a heavy chassis and a veneered lightweight shell for an offroad van. He sees the success of his hybrid Vision models as proof that automotive production design is the future. His direction is a monocoque body working in harmony with the chassis and cabinetry for a sum of great strength and durability. Of course, other builders have recognised this future, but Chris plans to take the integrated design concept to the next level while making the vans affordable and practical.

MERLIN
ARV
TRAKRYD
PEDDERS SUSPENSION

ABOVE Strong and durable construction method

> "If you check out the Sunseeker and Vision RV websites, you might notice a trend. *White and light-coloured vans predominate*"

BUILT TO ENDURE

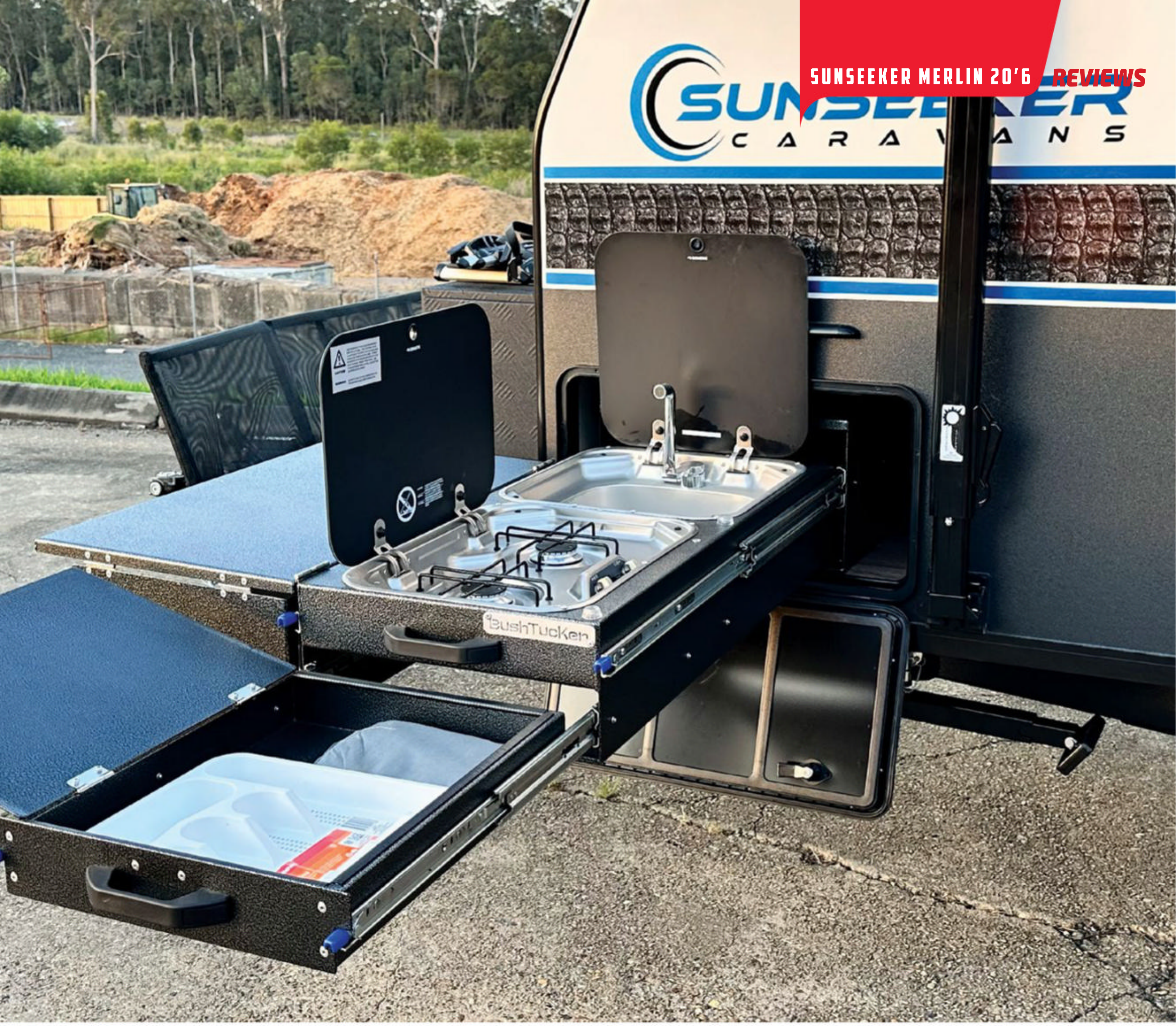
The manufacturing process begins long before a chassis rolls into the factory. The team explores design ideas and commits them to the computer-aided design program SOLIDWORKS, where a virtual 3D view of all aspects of the van can maximise the best use of the available space and check how furniture and people interact.

The body panels are 28mm from Link Composites using external skins of 1.6mm Italian fibreglass bonded to a central core of closed cell insulating foam. The front and rear walls and the roof are one piece of composite running from the A-frame to the rear bumper, while the floor is a single woven polymer panel covered with durable vinyl for maximum durability.

All CNC-shaped body components bond seamlessly within their slots and are protected by a sturdy J-mould before being secured to the chassis. The ARV 150mm x 50mm (6in x 2in) chassis wedded to a 50mm x 50mm riser, resulting in a robust unit. Twin Pedders shock absorbers are arranged vertically for optimal damping, supporting the tandem box-section trailing arm suspension. The brakes use 12in drums, and the 33in all-terrain tyres mounted on black alloy wheels enhance the van's adventurous character. Fitout under the chassis looked neat, with plumbing led well out of danger and the water tanks shrouded with shiny checkerplate.

CNC cut lightweight ply furniture is screwed and glued together and to the walls and floor using superior polymer adhesive/sealants while interlocking slots ensure a tight and accurate fit.

Modern digital switching in caravans involves complex electrical wiring, so it's essential to do it correctly and provide for servicing later on. To ensure a fault-free installation, the Sunseeker team runs the circuits through ducting in the cabinets and uses custom looms for a fault-free installation.



ABOVE The optional outdoor kitchen will make outdoor living a breeze

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

If you check out the Sunseeker and Vision RV websites, you might notice a trend. White and light-coloured vans predominate, which points to a modern caravan trend of black and dark grey vans that can cause Chris to get hot under the collar. He's been known to point an infrared camera at competitors' dark vans to demonstrate how hot they can be. I kind of agree, and I think white vans are neat. The Merlin's lines are clean and well-proportioned, and the graphics add to the appeal. Lower skirts of black Raptor-coated fibreglass bend to modern style demands and are a practical concession for easy repairs from stone damage.

Behind a 4WD-friendly Cruisemaster DO35 hitch is a stoneguard defending twin 9kg gas bottles and an alloy toolbox with jerry can holders on each side. A large window across the front of the van has a cover for travelling and adds to light and ventilation around the bed inside. Back from there is a tunnel boot where an optional well-designed kitchen slides out. Chris might be the master of outdoor cooking because his vans always seem to get it right. From Gympie (NSW) manufacturer, Bushtucker Kitchens, it's mint looking and complete with fold-out tables, a storage drawer, twin gas burners and a stainless-steel sink.

At the back is a minimalist bar with a single spare, an external shower and an access hatch to the very clever pump and tank selection manifold. Typically, pumps are hidden away and difficult to access and this compartment allows regular cleaning of the filter and the ability to drain tanks independently. The entry door is down the back, with a double step, suitable hand holds and a three-way security door.

AT A GLANCE

The Sunseeker Merlin 20'6 is a good-sized couples van for spending extended time travelling. Its robust construction will see it tackle those iconic outback destinations on everyone's bucket list, with the usual proviso to air down and drive sensibly. It has a well-considered power system on tap for remote camping.

> *“The Merlin 20’6 is the perfect long-term travel van for couples, one for the Big Lap where they won’t bump into each other* and where they can hunker down if the weather turns sour for a week”

ABOVE AND RIGHT The roomy interior kitchen with 34L combination microwave/grill/convection oven; Expansive views out the double-glazed and tinted windows

LIVEABILITY

Chris advises buyers to choose the smallest van that will suit their needs. To his way of thinking, the 20ft 6in (6.25m) Merlin is the perfect long-term travel van for couples, one for the Big Lap where they won’t bump into each other and where they can hunker down if the weather turns sour for a week. He might be right because this Merlin is a foot longer than the average couples van and offers amenities and space without needing a big American truck to tow it.

The layout separates the entry door from the bedroom, which is the most popular design for privacy and practical use of space. The ensuite is to the right of the door, making it easy to access from outside and reducing foot traffic through the van. You have plenty of space, lots of storage, a washing machine and a big, moulded shower. The vanity mirror is angled down so you get an almost full-length view of how you look, which is cool if you are planning a big night out.

Owners will like the roomy kitchen bench with an induction cooktop and a large 34L combination microwave, grill and convection oven. The cafe dinette gives decent legroom and expansive views through the new flat glass, double-glazed and tinted windows. Colour choices are conservative grey against white for a fresh and cheery feel, while hidden variable tone LED lighting adds to a laid-back mood. Contemporary touches include hidden cupboard catches, handy charging points and a digital switching system for lights and appliances.

SUNSEEKER
MERLIN 20'6

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Overall length 8.8m (28ft 8in)
Body length 6.25m (20ft 6in)
Width 2.49m (8ft)
Height 3.15m (10ft 3in)
Tare 2646kg
ATM 3500kg
Payload 854kg (calculated)
Ball weight at tare 161kg
Ball to tare ratio 6.1% (calculated)

EXTERNAL

Frame Fibreglass sandwich panel composite with XPS high density core
Cladding Italian 1.6mm fibreglass
Chassis 150mm x 50mm plus 50mm x 50mm SuperGal
Suspension Tandem ATV trailing arm independent with twin shock absorbers
Coupling Cruisemaster DO35
Brakes 12in drums
Wheels 285/70R17 all-terrain tyres
Water 190L freshwater and optioned-on 100L grey water
Battery 600Ah lithium
Inverter 3000W
Solar 880W
Air-conditioner Yes
Gas 2 x 9kg
Sway control N/A

INTERNAL

Cooking Induction cooktop
Microwave 34L three in one
Fridge 224L compressor
Bathroom Full width with separate shower and cassette toilet
Washing machine Yes
Hot water Swift 28L gas/electric

PRICE FROM 129,990

OPTIONS FITTED

- Extra fans
- Linex coated chassis
- Grey water tank

PRICE AS SHOWN $134,185

MORE INFORMATION

Sunseeker Caravans
290 Nicklin Way
Warana Qld 4575
P: 07 5491 1888
E: sales@sunseekercaravans.com.au
W: sunseekercaravans.com.au

SUNSEEKER
CARAVANS
MERLIN
03 5335 5774
Design

ABOVE AND BELOW The Merlin 20'6 towed smoothly on the back roads of Ballarat, Vic; The full-width bathroom has plenty of storage and a washing machine

STAYING OFF-GRID

The Merlin 20'6 comes with a standard package that makes you independent for a week or so. A 100L grey tank supplements 190L of fresh water, which is plenty if you are near a river or a beach but might mean frugal use of the shower elsewhere.

The solar and battery setup is impressive. On the roof are 880W of panels charging 600A lithium batteries through a combination Projecta Intelli-Grid 180A charger/3000W inverter. So, there is loads of power to run the 224L fridge indefinitely, as well as electrical cooking appliances. The twin 9kg gas supply should run the outdoor barbecue and water heater for a couple of months.

The toilet is a cassette with a composting unit as an option.

HOW DID IT TOW?

Check out the photos. I felt very regal towing the Merlin 20'6 around the back roads of Ballarat in a Range Rover. It may not be the most popular outback adventurer, but I bet it's among the most luxurious. The twin turbo 4.4L V8 produces 740Nm of torque through a silky smooth eight-speed automatic gearbox, which provides loads of power to bring the 2650kg along for the ride.

The Merlin 20'6 towed smoothly over dirt roads and at 100km/h on the open road. Its ATM is 3500kg, so most mid-range vehicles should suit it, but larger models like the LandCruiser or Patrol will be optimal. A Range Rover also works well

THE BOTTOM LINE

Sunseeker has changed course with its new range of composite-bodied vans. The first Merlin is a well-designed and spacious couples van suitable for long trips, including rough outback roads. The base price is $129,990. With options like extra fans and a Linex-coated chassis, it's $134,185, so it's well-priced in the competitive offroad sector.

RATINGS

VALUE FOR MONEY
Well-priced in its category

TOWABILITY
Sensible 3500kg ATM and tows smoothly

SUITABILITY FOR INTENDED TOURING
A van for couples on long trips or extended stays in national parks

BUILD QUALITY
Intelligent engineering and great attention to detail

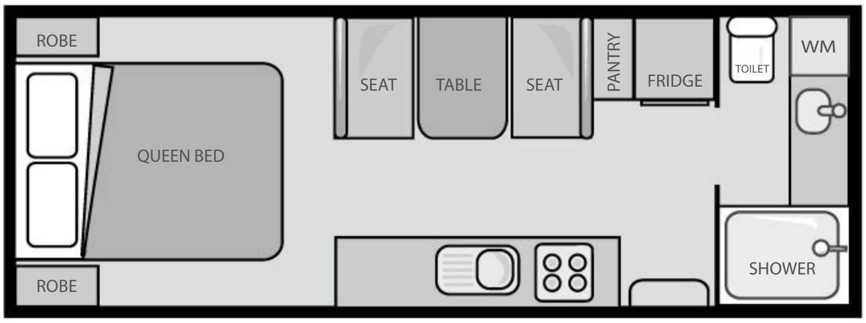
LIVEABILITY
Space for two to move and enjoy the van

SELF SUFFICIENCY
Sensible off-grid power and 190L of freshwater storage

CUSTOMER CARE
Seven-year warranty (two years factory plus five-year AWN extended)

INNOVATION
Sunseeker keeps design contemporary and the new monocoque construction is a positive

X-FACTOR
Conservative looks but it packs a punch



WHAT'S ON

LEFT Head to NSW's New England High Country for the Australian Celtic Festival

NSW

Australian Celtic Festival

1–4 May 2025

This four-day annual event celebrates the New England High Country's rich ties to the Celtic nations, and 2025 will shine a spotlight on Brittany, Cornwall and Wales, alongside the rich traditions of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man. Enjoy performers, dancers, pipe bands, a street parade, re-enactments and much more. Head online for more information: australiancelticfestival.com.au

Big Chill Festival

16–18 May 2025

Held at the Armidale Sportsground, visitors can enjoy craft beer, boutique gin, local wine, street food, firepits, market stalls and live music during this two-day event. Tickets can be purchased online: bigchill.com.au

Hunter Valley Caravan Camping 4WD & Fish Show

23–25 May 2025

Head to Maitland Showgrounds to check out the latest and the greatest RVs, 4WDs, gadgets and gear. There'll be hundreds of exhibitors on display, plenty of entertainment, food and free parking. Find out more online: ruralscene.com.au/hunter-valley-show

VIC

Grampians Grape Escape

2–4 May 2025

There's something for everyone at the annual Grampians Grape Escape. Held in Grampians National Park (Gariwerd), the three-day event is a celebration of western Victoria's finest wine, food and music. There'll be local produce, masterclasses, kid-friendly activities and much more. Tickets are available online: grampiansgrapeescape.com.au

The Great Trentham Spudfest

3–4 May 2025

Boil them, mash them, stick them in a stew — who doesn't love a good potato? The Great Trentham Spudfest honours the humble spud with a day-long celebration of all things potato. Immerse yourself in local produce, food, wine, live music and artists. It will truly be a feast for the senses. Find out more online: trenthamspudfest.org.au

TAS

Agfest

1–3 May 2025

Organised by Rural Youth Volunteers, Agfest has been running for more than 40 years and is returning to Quercus Park outside Carrick for three days dedicated to celebrating Tasmania's agricultural heritage. Enjoy local produce, 4WD demonstrations, equestrian events, woodchopping competitions, whip cracking and much more. Head online for more information: agfest.com.au

Australian Musical Theatre Festival

21–25 May 2025

The Australian Musical Theatre Festival (AMTF) is set to take Launceston by storm this May. There's an exciting lineup featuring musical theatre legends, emerging talent and an exciting collaboration with the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. There's something for all ages, so head online to find out more: amtf.org.au

SA

South Australia's History Festival

1–31 May 2025

South Australia's History Festival is an annual statewide event exploring South Australia's history. Held throughout May each year, the festival explores SA's places and spaces, stories, collections and ideas that make SA what it is. The theme for South Australia's History Festival 2025 is Decisions. Find out more online: festival.history.sa.gov.au

Clare Valley SCA Gourmet Week

16–25 May 2025

Experience music, food, wine tastings, masterclasses, cooking schools, historical tours, long lunches and much more over this week-long event held throughout the Clare Valley. The full program is available online: clarevalleygourmet.com.au

WA

Taste Great Southern

1–4 May 2025

Taste Great Southern is getting a revamp this year and is now a four-day event celebrating the wild spirit of Great Southern and the region's local talent, unique cultural heritage, premium produce and rugged beauty. Albany and Denmark will be the two main hubs, but smaller towns like Porongurup, Frankland River, Katanning and Mount Barker will also be taking part. Head online for the full program and tickets: tastegreatsouthern.com.au

Ord Valley Muster

16–24 May 2025

Don't miss this iconic Kimberley festival in Kununurra! There's something for all ages, including dining under the stars, live music, comedy, storytelling, rodeo and much more. Enjoy the local characters and flavours that make Kununurra and east Kimberley so unique. The full program and tickets are available online: ordvalleymuster.com.au

NT

Darwin Italian Festival

10 May 2025

The Darwin Italian Festival will take place at the Waterfront's Fort Hill Parklands for a fantastic day filled with sumptuous Italian cuisine, entertainment and style. Whether it's wood-fired pizzas, crunchy pastries, Italian sausages, pasta or sparkling wine, there's something for everyone. Find out more online: waterfront.nt.gov.au/darwin-italian-festival-2025

Taste of Kakadu

23–25 May 2025

Mark your calendars and bring your appetite — the famous Taste of Kakadu Food and Culture Festival is returning in 2025. Set against the ancient landscapes of Kakadu National Park, this much-anticipated festival brings together Australia's oldest living culture and a celebration of native flavours for a culturally immersive experience like no other. Tickets are available online: kakadu.gov.au/things-do/events/taste-kakadu

QLD

Kalbar Sunflower Festival

2–4 May 2025

Enjoy a fun weekend filled with live entertainment, helicopter rides, workshops for children, cooking classes, mini photo sessions, arts and crafts and more at the Kalbar Sunflower Festival in Queensland's Scenic Rim. Find out more online: kalbarsunflowers.com.au

Hughenden Festival of Outback Skies

2–4 May 2025

Hughenden Festival of Outback Skies is a three-day festival embracing the essence of the outback, showcasing live music, art, workshops and events against the backdrop of Queensland's impressive big skies. A full program and tickets are available online: festivalofoutbackskies.com.au

Cairns Expo

9–11 May 2025

Head to the Cairns Showgrounds this May for three days chock full of products, services and brands dedicated to helping you hit the road on your next adventure. There'll be the latest caravans, campers, hybrids 4WDs, boats, accessories, camping gear and so much more. Find out more online: cairnsexpo.com.au

VISITING THE NEVER NEVER

Words and Pics
JILL HARRISON

Having reread Jeannie Gunn's memoirs* The Little Black Princess *published in 1905 and* We of The Never-Never *published in 1908, Jill Harrison visited old Elsey Station Cemetery at Mataranka on a Northern Territory caravanning trip.

Visiting the scattered graves, memorial plaques, and the grave of Aeneas Gunn, 'The Maluka', under the red flowers and pods of the bauhinia trees, brought Jeannie's characters to life for me: William Neaves, the Dandy Stockman, the Sanguine Scot, Mine Host, the Fizzer, Horse Teams, an unknown traveller, and Dolly Bonson known as Bett-Bett (The Little Black Princess) and others who lay in this secluded cemetery.

Jeannie's husband Aeneas died from malarial dysentery on 16 March 1903 and Jeannie returned to Melbourne, 13 months after her arrival at Elsey Station, never to return. Despite her short time at Elsey, and the death of Aeneas, Elsey Station and the people made an enormous impression on Jeannie, who died in 1961.

Visit the Never Never Museum in Mataranka to learn the rich history of the region through historical artefacts, interpretative displays and photographs describing Aboriginal and European history, including development of the North Australian Railway, the Overland Telegraph, World War II history and the story of Aeneas and Jeannie Gunn and Elsey Station.

Explorer Augustus Charles Gregory named Elsey Creek after his party's surgeon Dr JR Elsey in July 1856. Abraham Wallace established Elsey Station in 1881 with cattle driven 3219km overland from Queensland. Elsey had several owners before Aeneas Gunn took over as Manager in 1902. There is a plaque on the site of the Elsey Station buildings.

Arriving at Elsey early in 1902, the news of the boss's marriage and Jeannie's arrival caused alarm on the station, but 'the little missus' soon won the admiration of the stockmen. The homestead was basic when

ELSEY NATIONAL & CEMETERY RESERVE

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Elsey Cemetery; Recreation of Elsey Homestead; Elsey Station site; Grave of Aeneas Gunn; Bitter Springs thermal pools are a must-visit

FAST FACTS

Where is it?
Mataranka is a small town 421km south of Darwin on the Stuart Highway in the Northern Territory.

Best time to visit
Dry season — May to September.

Handy info
- The Elsey Cemetery is located 21km south of Mataranka, on Elsey Cemetery Road off Stuart Highway. The cemetery is a declared heritage place and protected under the NT Heritage Conservation Act.
- Entry to the Bitter Springs thermal pools and Mataranka Homestead thermal pools requires a NT Parks Pass.
- The Never Never Museum in Mataranka is open Monday to Friday and Sunday during the dry season. Entry fees apply.

More information:
- Australian Dictionary of Biography
  W: adb.anu.edu.au/biography/gunn-jeannie-6506
- Bitter Springs Cabins and Camping
  W: bitterspringscabins.com.au
- Elsey National Park
  W: nt.gov.au/parks/find-a-park/elsey-national-park
- Mataranka Homestead Tourist Resort
  W: matarankahomestead.com.au
- NT Parks Pass
  W: nt.gov.au/parks/parks-pass
- Roper Gulf Regional Council
  W: ropergulf.nt.gov.au

Jeannie arrived, "with the exception of the one roughly finished room at its eastern end, it was mostly verandas and promises"*. Over time, it was made more comfortable including a hand sewn mosquito net hung from the ceiling to enclose the table and chairs.

Some 108km south of Katherine, it was an isolated existence. Cut off for months during the wet season, they looked forward to the road opening, bringing supply wagons and the 'the fizzer' delivering long-awaited mail. The homestead was efficiently run by the Chinese cook, Cheon, and young Aboriginal girls, but one wonders how Cheon managed to create meals during the wet season.

We chose to stay at the lovely Bitter Springs Cabins and Camping park only 3km from town. It is an easy 500m walk from the park to Bitter Springs thermal pools in Elsey National Park – bring a pool noodle and float down with the relaxing current.

Known as 'Korran' by the Aboriginal people, it was named Bitter Springs in 1871 by Steven King, a worker on the Overland Telegraph Line and renamed Mataranka, a Yangman name meaning 'place' or 'land of the snake', the name given to a sheep station in 1915 by John Alexander Gilruth.

A replica station house, located at the Mataranka Homestead Tourist Resort, was constructed for the filming of the movie *We of the Never Never* in 1982 starring Angela Punch McGregor and Arthur Dignam. At the resort you can take a dip in the stone lined thermal pool which was frequented by soldiers during WWII.

More than 100 military units were based at Mataranka during WWII, including a hospital, ammunition dumps, workshops and an Aboriginal labour force.

The Mangarrayi and Yangman people are the Traditional Owners of the approximately 13,800ha Elsey National Park, through which the Roper River runs. There are historical sites and walking trails and bush camping at Jalmurark Campground. Do not swim in the river due to crocodile risk.

* *Quote from* We of the Never Never *by Jeannie Gunn (published as by Mrs Aeneas Gunn)*

ABOVE Installing an anti-flap kit on your awning can be an easy job if you have the right skills

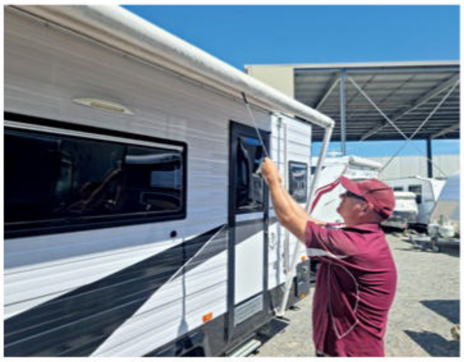
Words and Pics John Hughes

INSTALLING AN AWNING ANTI-FLAP KIT

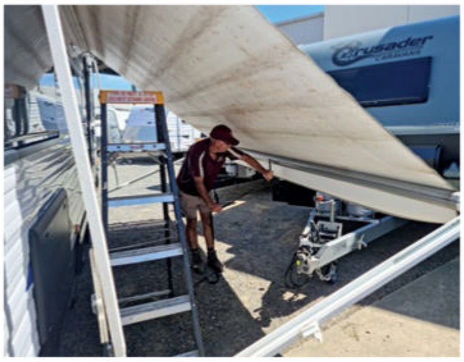
This month the RV Repair Centre shows us how to install an anti-flap kit for roll-out awnings.

Awnings are a great way to protect you from the weather, but they don't like the wind. In wild wind, the best action is to close them up. In moderate wind, securing the awning with pegs and guy ropes is best practice. But they still have an annoying habit of flapping in the breeze. Anti-flap kits are designed to minimise this.

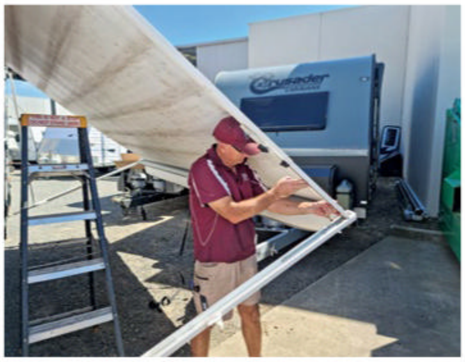
The team at RV Repair Centre walked us through the process of installing an Aussie Traveller anti-flap kit for roll-out awnings. It is a general guide – refer to the manufacturer's instructions for specific details. You need to drive small screws into your caravan wall and drill holes into your awning roller. If that's in your skillset then this job might be for you. It's important to know anti-flap kits come in various lengths so make sure you do the homework to get the right size.



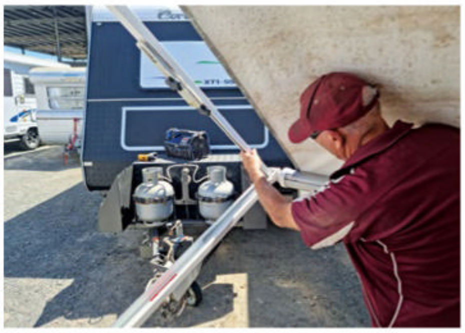
1 Pull out the awning



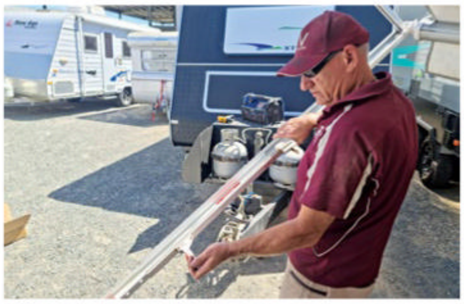
2 Extend the awning to its full length and set the awning ratchet to the 'open' position



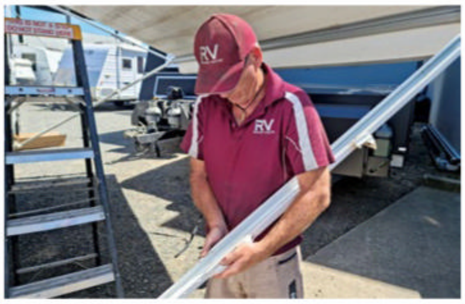
3 Slide the awning inner arm to the extended position on one side



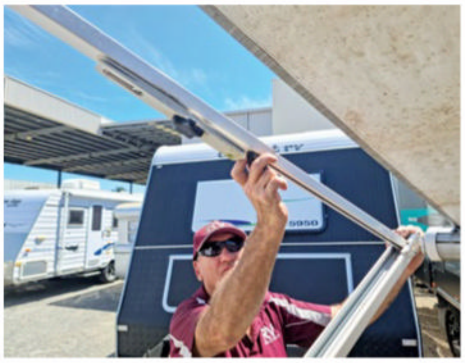
4 Slide the awning inner arm to the extended position on the other side



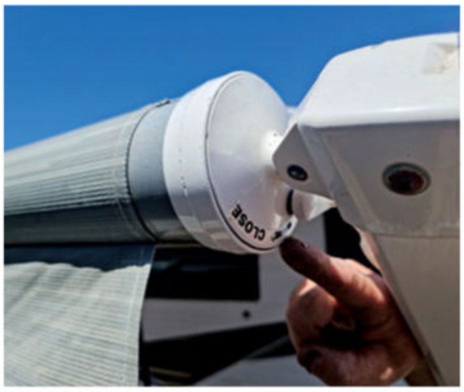
5 Extend the outer arm on one side



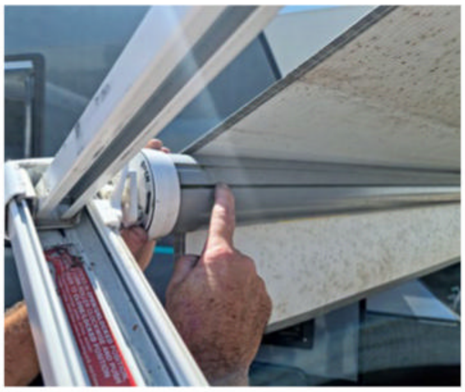
6 Extend the outer arm on the other side



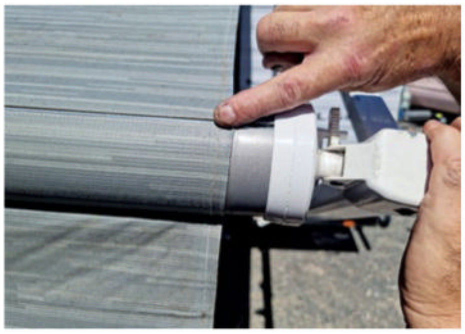
7 Tighten the knobs on both inner arms



8 Move the awning ratchet to the 'closed' position

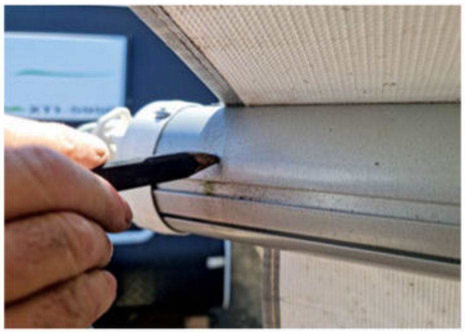


9 Roll the awning in slightly so that the strap track is located at the three o'clock position



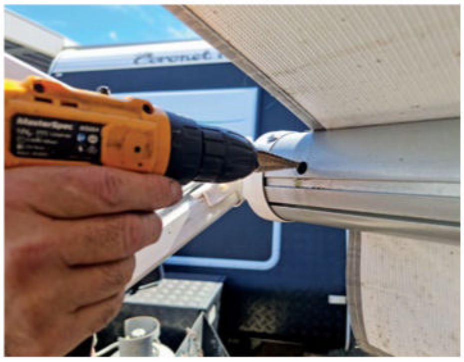
10 Check the fabric join is at about 12 o'clock. This will let water run off the roller and avoid water sitting in the stitching and dripping

11 Rotate the awning roller slightly to allow access for a drill



12 Mark the awning roller to drill a hole to accept the anti-flap arm spigot on one side — check the instructions for the correct position

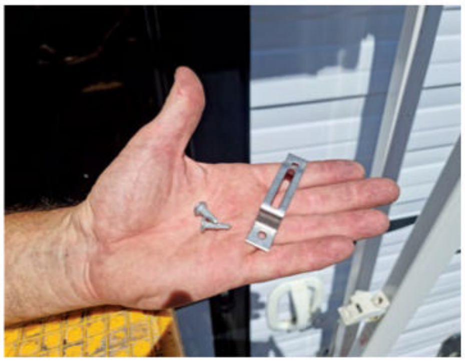
13 Repeat marking the spigot hole position on the opposite side



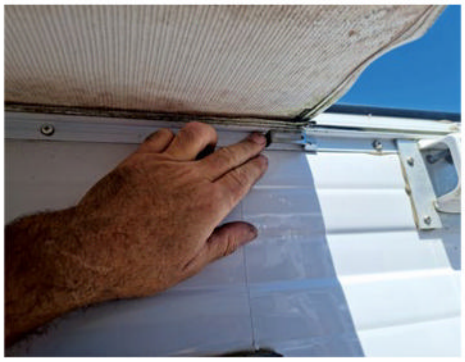
14 Drill a hole to accept the spigot on one side

15 Repeat the hole-drilling process on the other side

16 Return the awning roller so the strap track is located at the three o'clock position

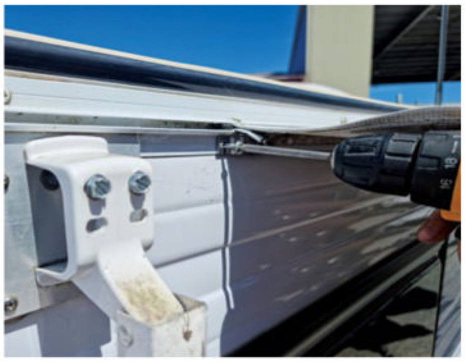


17 The kit is supplied with screws to mount the wall brackets. We used shorter screws to reduce the chance of penetrating wires etc.

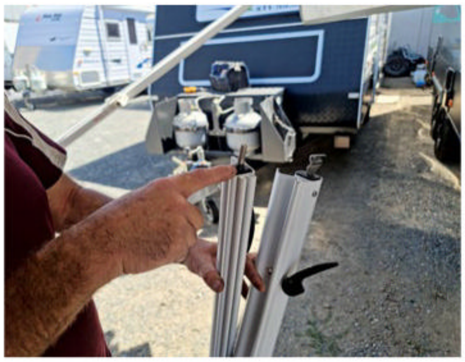


18 Position the wall bracket in line with the edge of the awning fabric — refer to instructions

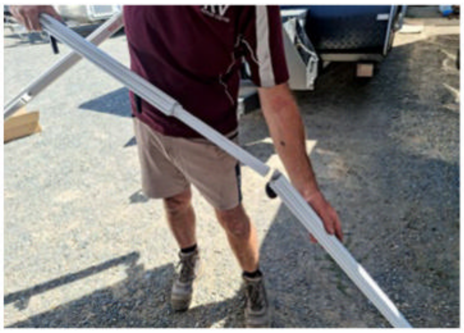
19 Secure the wall bracket with screws



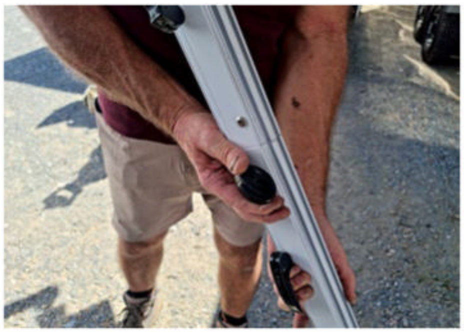
20 Repeat the process of positioning the wall bracket and mounting it with screws on the opposite side



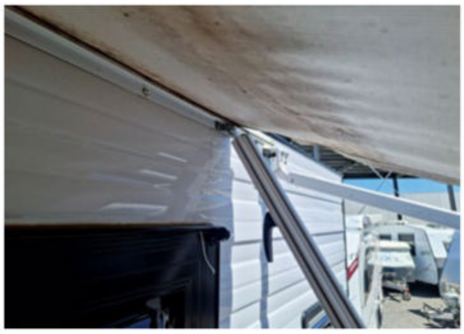
21 The kit has two arms. Each arm is two pieces



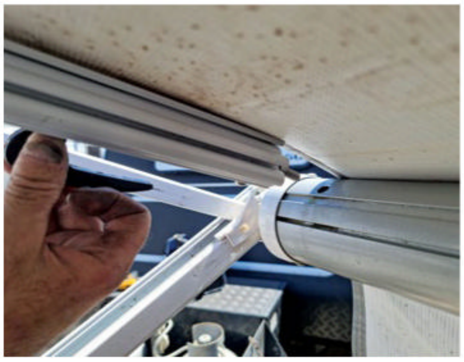
22 Join the two pieces of one of the arms together



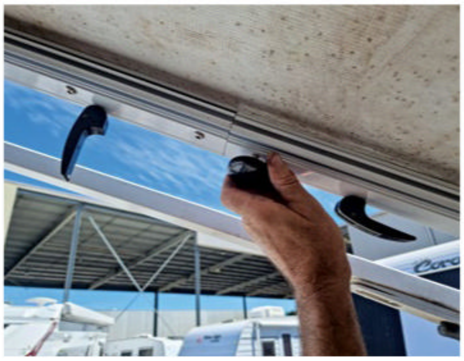
23 Do not over-tighten the knob so the arm length can be adjusted by sliding the two pieces



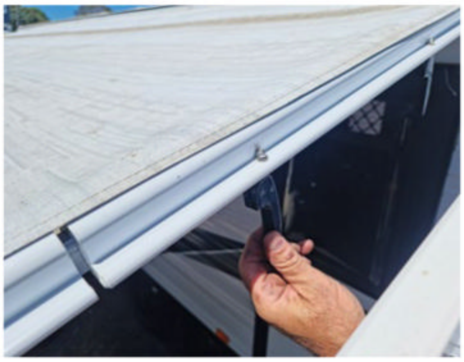
24 Hook one end of the arm onto the wall mount bracket



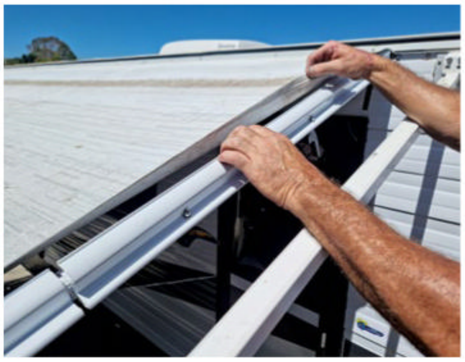
25 Insert the spigot on the other end of the arm into the awning drum hole



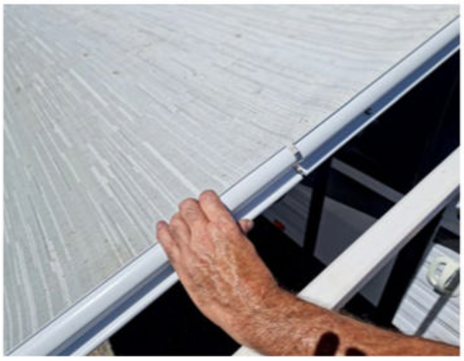
26 Tighten the knob at the required length



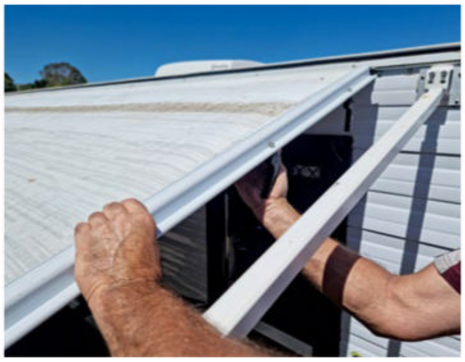
27 The arm has levers which enable a clamping action on the fabric



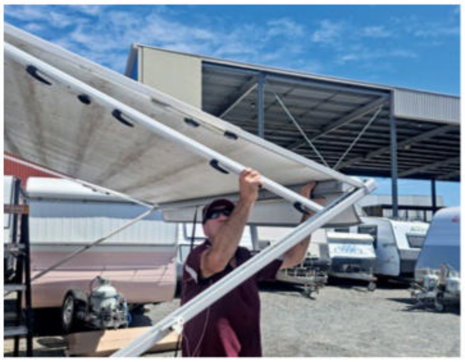
28 Tuck the fabric into the clamp in the upper section of the arm



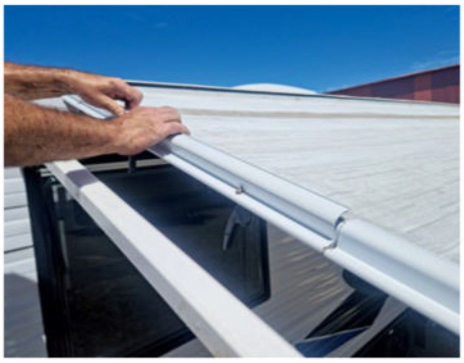
29 Repeat the tucking process on the lower section of the arm



30 Use the levers to clamp the fabric



31 Repeat the process of joining the arms and connecting with the wall bracket and spigot on the opposite side



32 Repeat the process of tucking in the fabric and clamping it on the opposite side

NOTE: It is important to keep the awning ratchet in the 'closed position' so that it does not unwind in the wind causing the set-up to become loose.

IF IN DOUBT, CONSULT A PROFESSIONAL

Improper maintenance can lead to injury, death or property damage. Maintenance work of this nature should only be undertaken by people with suitable competence. The information provided is general in nature, not comprehensive and should only be taken as a guide. Individual discretion must be exercised and persons undertaking described tasks do so completely at their own risk. Publishers and creators of this content accept no responsibility for loss or damage.

Thanks to Andrew Phillips and the team from the RV Repair Centre, 120 Canterbury Road, Bayswater North Vic 3151, P: 03 9761 4189

CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Real time status on the battery via RedVision app; Check power inputs and outputs remotely; The BCDC Alpha R is designed to be a mini vehicle power management system

REDARC'S NEW BCDC ALPHA R DC BATTERY MANAGER

For those who love off-grid adventures or working remotely while travelling with in their van, REDARC Electronics has expanded its BCDC Alpha Series with the release of the BCDC Alpha50 R DC Battery Manager, a powerful solution for off-grid power management. Now available in a 50A model, the BCDC Alpha R offers smarter charging and monitoring features, allowing users to maximise their auxiliary power systems while travelling.

Offering more than just charging, the BCDC Alpha R is designed to be a mini vehicle power management system. It's a DC-DC charger to keep your auxiliary battery charged using both your vehicle's alternator and solar panels, ensuring you'll always have power for essential gear when off-grid or working remotely, such as fridges, lights, laptops and small appliances.

The BCDC Alpha50 R is the most powerful charger in REDARAC's BCDC lineup, building on the range's key features while adding extra functionality.

So, what can you expect from the BCDC Alpha50 R?

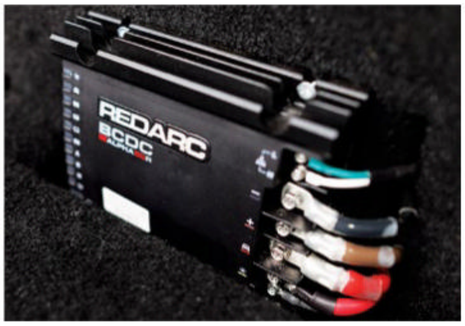
Instant monitoring: Check your battery's status remotely with the RedVision app or display. Like the Manager Alpha, this system gives you real-time updates on battery levels, charge status and input/output currents, helping you keep track of your power usage and avoid surprises.

Full system integration: The BCDC Alpha R integrates seamlessly with other REDARC products, including RedVision and TVMS devices, creating a comprehensive power management solution. With over-the-air updates, you'll always benefit from the latest tech advancements. When using the BCDC Alpha R alongside a TVMS you'll also be able to switch systems such as lights on and off via the RedVision app or display.

Start battery recovery: Unique to REDARC's BCDC range, the BCDC Alpha R is the only DC-DC charger that offers both start battery charging and recovery. If you're caught out with a flat start battery, you can simply use the BCDC Alpha R to recover it in just 15 minutes at the push of a button.

Optimised charging: The charger intelligently and automatically adjusts its settings to meet your battery's needs in real-time, ensuring maximum efficiency and extending the life of your battery.

The BCDC Alpha R also includes the tried-and-true features of the original BCDC Alpha, including compatibility with hybrid and electric vehicles (EVs), start battery recovery and the ability to receive over-the-air updates. Installing the BCDC Alpha R is simple, with a push-button interface and screw terminals — no soldering required.

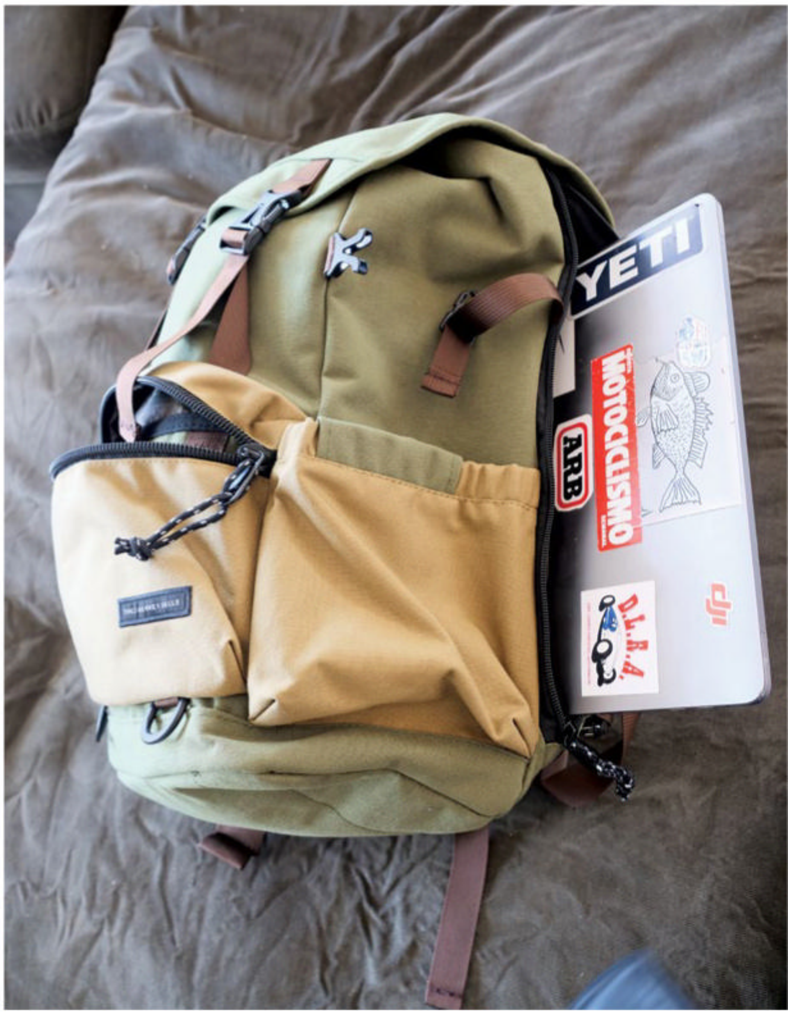


Commenting on the release, REDARC global president Peter Favilla said, "The BCDC Alpha R is our most sophisticated BCDC yet, enhancing the original model by integrating advanced system connectivity and control. With visibility to battery stage of charge, start battery recovery and vastly simplified installation, this offering enables the end user to power their adventures and remove power anxiety."

Designed for in-cabin installation, the BCDC Alpha R includes REDARC's Smart Battery Monitor (BSEN500) for accurate state-of-charge monitoring. For those looking to customise their setup even more, additional TVMS systems and RedVision displays are available.

The REDARC BCDC Alpha50 R DC Battery Monitor is available online now for a RRP of $1499.

To learn more about the BCDC Alpha Series and explore other REDARC products, head online: redarcelectronics.com



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE Smart and stylish in the Kakadu Khaki colour option; Plenty of storage; External side pockets for water bottles

ZORALI ESCAPADE BACKPACK

Editor John Ford tested the Zorali backpack and discovered it is functional as well as really cool … **Words and Pics** John Ford

When Zorali sent me an Escapade Backpack to try, it looked pretty stylish and seemed a sensible size for a day pack or general use when travelling. Only a week later, we were in the local theatre for the Bob Dylan biopic *A Complete Unknown* when the Timothee Chalamet character stepped off the mythical freight train in New York sporting a 60s-era backpack that looked remarkably like the Escapade. Bob's my hero, the original vagabond, so the Zorali backpack's cool factor jumped to a 10.

Zorali — meaning fearless and full of life — is an Australian company based in Coolum Beach, Qld, established seven years ago. It is supported by gatherings and events within a global community of Zorelian outdoorists, as they like to call themselves. The product range includes clothing, tents, sleeping bags and hiking gear, much of which is recycled and all of which is backed by tree-planting programs worldwide.

The Escapade backpack is made from durable 1000 denier Oxford Nylon and has 30L of internal storage in two compartments. External pockets hold water bottles or a small tripod, and a padded zippered section for computers up to 15 inches. Two zippered compartments give quick access to important smaller items, and there's a clip to keep keys safe. The backpack looks well-constructed with quality stitching and heavy-duty zippers and buckles.

Adjustable padded shoulder straps, a chest clip and a detachable waist belt allow versatile fitting and comfortable use for walking around town or on strenuous hikes.

The Zorali Escapade Backpack is extremely comfortable, and the straps make it secure when bushwalking. It's small enough to fit airline lockers and large enough for a weekend's change of clothes and necessities.

Weighing 880g and measuring 48cm x 28cm x 21cm, the Escapade sells for $170 and is available in six colours, including the Kakadu Khaki pictured here. It comes with a lifetime warranty.

Further information zorali.com

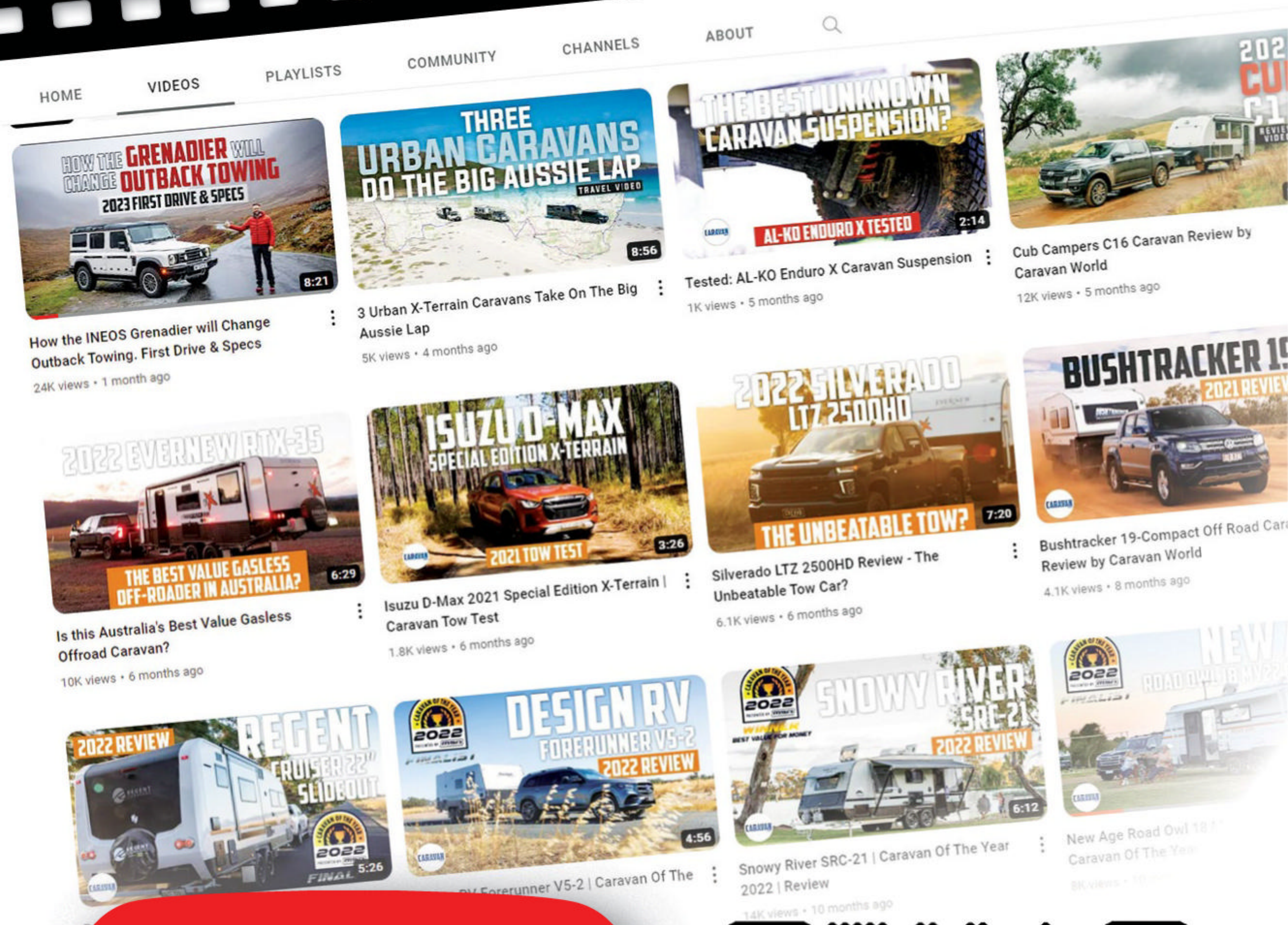
MAIN COTY 2025 Showcase day (Image Ted Airey)

The Move
CARAVANS
CARAVAN OF THE YEAR 2025
Infinity 15

Next issue

**ON SALE
8 MAY**

In May we're kicking off our Caravan of the Year 2025 presented by MSA 4X4 Accessories content! There'll be the first six in-depth reviews from the judges, behind the scenes insights, plus some great travel inspiration.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